

THE TURN OF THE SCREW
THE ASPERN PAPERS

and Other Stories

HENRY JAMES

With an Introduction by

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HENRY JAMES

On the 15th of April, 1843, Henry James was born in New York. His father, also Henry James, was well known as a theological writer and lecturer, an enthusiastic exponent of Swedenborg and later of Charles Fourier. In July 1840 he married Mary Robertson (whose ancestors could claim both Irish and Scottish descent), a woman of sterling domestic virtues, who appears to have governed her unruly brood of four sons and a daughter with quiet grace and unperturbed dignity. Their first son, William, was born two years after the marriage, and in that year the family moved to No. 21 Washington Place, the house in which Henry James, junior, was born.

In the early years of his life Henry's education was supervised by his father, who, remembering his own joyless childhood, shrank from anything that would prove "narrowing" for his children. He insisted that their education be as liberal and eclectic as possible. His own brilliant rhetoric and gift of language made the art of conversation a natural part of their upbringing, and both William and Henry inherited from their father much of their psychological insight and subtlety, and their feeling for English style. William, in later years, became a distinguished philosopher, while Henry (known until his father's death as Henry James junior) gained from those early years a sensitive critical faculty, which was to influence his entire literary output.

Thus unencumbered by a formal education, Henry attended numerous schools in New York, London, Paris and Geneva, the impressionable years from 12 to 17 being spent in Europe, chiefly in Geneva. In the summer of 1858 the family returned from Europe and took a house in Newport, Rhode Island. They stayed there only a year before journeying once more to the Continent, where the elder Henry believed the schooling of his boys could be more satisfactorily completed, and were back again in Newport by the autumn of 1860. Frequent uprootings from their surroundings were common in the James family life and, were probably largely responsible for the feelings of insecurity and instability which so perturbed Henry as a child.

Henry was fond of the life in Newport, maintaining in later years that it was "the one right residence in all our great country." Two friendships were formed there which were to

have a deep and enduring influence : Thomas Sergeant Perry was perhaps his closest friend—two years younger, he lived even more than Henry in a world of books; John la Farge, the painter, was seven years older. The picture of Henry James which la Farge was to leave for posterity shows a handsome, somewhat world-weary youth of 18, with a large though well-shaped nose, full lips and a serious, rather brooding expression. About this time Henry himself was studying painting under William Morris Hunt, more to suit the convenience of his elder brother, William, then an enthusiastic pupil of Hunt's, than to satisfy any strong artistic leanings of his own.

Meanwhile he was experiencing a literary awakening of the kind which is likely to occur in an imaginative young person suddenly introduced to a body of literature quite foreign to his traditions. Through his friendship with la Farge he began to read modern French novelists of the realistic school, particularly Balzac and the more recent works of Gautier and Mérimée. His knowledge of these authors strengthened his growing desire to fit himself for a profession, and certainly his profound study of French fiction served as a rigorous and most effective apprenticeship, one which was to leave its mark on James's entire literary career.

In 1862 he entered the Harvard Law School, although he does not appear to have concentrated very seriously on his law studies, but devoted almost all his time to writing. The first of his book reviews appeared in the "North American Review" in October, 1864, to be followed a few months later by the first of his short stories, entitled *The Story of a Year*, in the "Atlantic Monthly."

His family had followed him to Cambridge in 1864, and assisted by his father's connections he soon came in touch for the first time with a purely literary circle. There he gained the acquaintance of Professor Charles Norton and formed a lifelong friendship with William Dean Howells, the novelist. Although James was still in his early twenties his writing had already begun to attract attention ; when he was only 25 Norton offered him the editorship of the "North American Review," a post which he declined partly because of ill-health.

Almost all his life James was subject to bouts of bad health. These may have been due to an obscure injury to his back which he suffered in 1861, and which in later years obliged him to travel constantly in search of a climate which suited him.

In the winter of 1869 he set out for Europe to renew the memories of his childhood. It turned out to be a stay of only

fourteen months, but in that time he visited London, France and Italy, returning in the late autumn to England, where he made his first acquaintance with George Eliot. Of this meeting he writes : "She is magnificently ugly—deliciously hideous . . . now in this vast ugliness resides a most powerful beauty which, in a very few minutes, steals forth and charms the mind so that you end, as I ended, in falling in love with her." Yet impressed as he was by her distinguished presence, James never appears to have fallen in love, or indeed formed any romantic attachments whatsoever, save perhaps with his cousin, Minny Temple. This friendship did not have the opportunity to ripen into anything more permanent, however, for after months of suffering from acute tuberculosis, Minny Temple died in 1869. It is very doubtful though, whether James had ever seriously considered marrying her or that their relationship was anything more than that of close friends. James certainly never appeared to be interested thereafter in forming any other intimate relations with the fair sex.

From his return to America in the spring of 1870 until his final departure for Europe in 1875, Henry James lived with his family in Cambridge—with the exception of a long European tour, 1872-4. Europe fascinated him, as it had done during his childhood, and the current of literary trends as well as the scope which the Continent seemed to offer, confirmed his resolve to leave his native land and settle permanently there.

In 1875, he was firmly established in Paris, and thus for the first time came into contact with the writers he had studied so assiduously, Zola, Flaubert, Daudet and Maupassant. He travelled extensively, much of his enthusiasm for the places he visited being evinced in the travel books *Transatlantic Sketches* (1875), *Portraits of Places* (1883) and *A Little Tour in France* (1884). His writings at this time were profuse, novels and short stories in particular, which were chiefly concerned with the impact of the older civilisation of Europe upon the American way of life and the relations between Americans in Europe and European society. To this period belong his more popular novels : *Roderick Hudson*, which appeared in 1875 and was greatly acclaimed, *The American* (1877), *Daisy Miller* (1879), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). *Washington Square*, published in 1881, and *The Bostonians* (1886), are his only novels which deal exclusively with American life, and are among his most distinguished.

Apart from his writings his life passed uneventfully on the whole. He left France in the latter half of 1876 and, encouraged by his brother William, made his home in England for the remainder of his life. Gradually he entered into the social life of London and

made the acquaintance of such people as George Moore, Tennyson and Lord Rosebery, though perhaps his closest friends were Robert Louis Stevenson and Edmund Gosse. His numerous social engagements were varied with occasional trips to the Continent for the sake of recreation but more often for seclusion.

The increasing need for a permanent home, to which he could retire and gain some respite from the pressing engagements of London society, induced him in 1898 to purchase Lamb House at Rye, Sussex. It was a small house, small by comparative standards, but James was completely happy there. For some time previously he had been concentrating chiefly on short story writing, except for repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to write plays (*Theatricals*, in two volumes, were published in 1894-5). But after he was established in Lamb House he began the series of novels which marked his second and more complex phase. *The Spoils of Poynton* and *What Maisie Knew* appeared in 1897 and 1898 respectively. Both short novels, they were followed by the more lengthy *The Awkward Age* (1899). This style of writing he successfully developed, and, returning to the international situation as his subject matter, produced *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

In 1899, while on a visit to Rome he agreed to write a biography of his old friend, William Wetmore Story. It was published in two volumes in 1903 under the title *William Wetmore Story and his Friends*.

Then, in 1904, he made the long awaited visit to America, the first for twenty years. Knowing how formidable the return would be after so many years, he had repeatedly delayed it. He summed up his visit, thus : " I found my native land, after so many years, interesting, formidable, fearsome and fatiguing, and much more difficult to see and deal with in any extended and various way than I had supposed . . . it is an extraordinary world, an altogether huge proposition . . . but almost cruelly charmless, in effect, and calculated to make one crouch ever afterwards as cravenly as possible, at Lamb House, Rye." His memorable volume of impressions, entitled *The American Scene*, was published in 1907.

Two volumes of his autobiography were published before his death in 1915, *A Small Boy and Others* (1913) and *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914) ; but the third volume, *The Middle Years* did not appear until 1917.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 he became intensely patriotic towards England, having for a long time disliked Germany and all things German. Thus it is not surprising that in June 1915, as a result of his passionate attachment to the Allied cause, he

HENRY JAMES

became a naturalised British subject. He received the Order of Merit on January 1st, 1916, and on February 28th, of the same year, he died in his flat in Chelsea. His memorial tablet is inscribed with the words : "lover and interpreter of the fine amenities, of brave decisions and generous loyalties."

M. H. C.

CONTENTS

<i>Henry James</i>	<i>page</i> 5
<i>Introduction</i>	13
The Diary of a Man of Fifty (1879)	19
Lady Barbarina (1884)	47
The Aspern Papers (1888)	129
Brooksmith (1892)	211
The Lesson of the Master (1892)	226
The Figure in the Carpet (1896)	281
The Turn of the Screw (1898)	315
The Velvet Glove (1910)	410
The Bench of Desolation (1910)	435
<i>Bibliography</i>	478

INTRODUCTION

IN the series of prefaces which Henry James wrote for the "New York" edition of his collected works one idea is constantly turning up; the idea that it is Art which "makes" Life, that it is the imagination of the literary artist which must shape clumsy life in such a way as to express the meaning of existence. Those who have attacked Henry James, such as H. G. Wells, have claimed that this insistence on the sacredness of Art must imply a corresponding lack of belief in the sacredness of Life. It is a matter which might be argued about indefinitely, but here I am concerned with this credo of James specially in relation to his short stories. In his maturity James wrote hardly a short story which did not arise from some actual happening in life. In the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton* he says "most of the stories straining to shape under my hand have sprung from a single small seed, a seed as minute and wind-blown as that casual hint for *The Spoils of Poynton*, dropped unwittingly by my neighbour, a mere floating particle in the stream of talk." He always, when referring to these germs, insists that they should be fine and penetrating—"this fineness it is that communicates the virus of suggestion, anything more than the minimum of which spoils the operation."

From his journals which were published for the first time a few years ago one can see that James noted down these conversational hints, from which stories, even novels, would one day emerge. The germ of his great novel, *The Ambassadors*, was a story he was told of a man who felt life had passed him by, and who one day told a young man to "Live! Live! That's all, in the end, that matters." His long story, *The Aspern Papers* (included in this volume) arose from a conversation which he had with Vernon Lee's brother in Florence, on January 12th, 1887. Here is the opening of his note in his journal: "Hamilton told me a curious thing of Capt. Silsbee—the Boston art-critic and Shelley-worshipper . . . Miss Claremont, Byron's *ci-devant* mistress . . . was living, until lately, here in Florence . . . and with her lived her niece . . . of about 50. Silsbee knew that they had interesting papers—letters of Shelley's and Byron's—he had known it for a long time and cherished the idea of getting hold of them . . ." His outline of the anecdote of Silsbee's pursuit of the papers is almost identical with that of the American scholar who pursues, in Venice, the papers of Jeffrey Aspern, but in most cases one sees how the original germ has been moulded and modified

INTRODUCTION

before becoming a story. Yet it is remarkable that the working note-books do show that James was immensely concerned with the anecdotal side of his stories ; he plays with situations, gives them the ironic twist or the missing symmetry which the best *raconteurs* offer their listeners. In general the neat little situations which James so loved are, as frameworks for stories, rather trivial and could have been worked out by most competent craftsmen of the contemporary short-story. The note-books have little in them to suggest that James's imagination would soar during the actual creation of his work. The stories in their finished state have far more of the stuff of life and penetrating comment on existence than, given their inspiration, they have any claim to. The dispute between the pro-Jamesians and the anti-Jamesians (who like to refer to him as "James the Old Pretender") largely revolves round this point. H. G. Wells described him as "a hippopotamus rolling a pea," and Mr. Stephen Spender echoes the idea when he writes, "we are fascinated by the spectacle of the great lonely giant mountain giving birth to a brood of mice."

James was, as he might have put it himself, immensely the artist, and this volume includes two of the many stories he wrote which are parables about the life of the artist, the problems of the dedicated literary man. These stories are among his finest, and in my opinion *The Figure in the Carpet* is the best. It arose from the germ which he noted in his journal : "I seem to see a little subject in this idea ; that of the author of certain books who is known to hold . . . that his writings contain a very beautiful and valuable, very beautiful and remunerative *secret*, or latent intention, for those who read him with a right intelligence—who see *into* them, as it were—bring to the perusal of them a certain perceptive sense." James seems to be saying to himself here that he's hit on a good little idea for a yarn, no more. But the story in the end became a shattering attack on the insensibility of the mass of the reading public at the time (1895), an avowal of his own dedication and a refusal to come out into the market-place and sell his wares cheap. He wrote the story shortly after the complete failure of his play *Guy Domville* in which he had avowedly made an attempt to win the popular admiration which one side of him so longed for. The stories about dedicated writers which he wrote in the years following this failure all seem to suggest that he himself was their subject, a man who had had what he liked to call his "sawdust and orange peel phase" and from now on would keep his eyes directed on the stars. They are stories which form an essential part of James's biography—or autobiography. Few writers have been more implicated in their work than he was ;

INTRODUCTION

the mental states and problems, the decisions to be faced, the changes of moral sensibility which composed each phase of his life—all are reflected in his stories.

In the first phase of his mature life James was fascinated by what he called the "international situation." This had nothing to do with the Bulgarian Atrocities or the Schleswig Holstein question ; it refers to the spiritual interplay between Europe and America. His first memory was of a glimpse of the column in the Place Vendôme which he saw, he insists, when he was in swaddling clothes, and he received much of his early education in France and Switzerland. His subject, he decided when in 1872 he settled down to write his first novel, *Roderick Hudson*, was to be the American in Europe. Later his aim broadened—*The Europeans*, for instance, is about Europeans in America—but for many years this interplay was to be his theme, with Europe invariably seen as being heavy with age and wisdom, while America is innocent and uncorrupt, and not without its vulgarity. His best known story in this manner is *Daisy Miller*, which brought him the greatest popular success he was ever to know. The "international" story included in this volume is *Lady Barbarina*. In his note-book James wrote of the story, "I have already treated the subject of the American girl who . . . marries a British aristocrat. This story reverses the situation and presents a young male American who conceives the design of marrying a daughter of the aristocracy." It turned out to be a brilliant study in the contrast between the "Englishness" of Lady Barbarina and her alien New York surroundings.

At the time when James wrote *Lady Barbarina* (1883) his view of the international situation was simple and allowed for little subtlety of treatment. But when, in his last great period, he returned to the theme in his three masterpieces, *The Ambassadors*, *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of a Dove*, it was with a far deeper awareness of its seriousness. A passage from his preface to *Lady Barbarina* in the Collected Edition will show how seriously he thought of the theme :

"Behind all the small comedies and tragedies of the international . . . has exquisitely lurked for me the idea of some eventual sublime consensus of the educated ; the exquisite conceivabilities of which, intellectual, moral, emotional, sensual, social, political—all, I mean, in the face of felt difficulty and danger—constitute stuff for such 'situations' as may easily make many of those of a more familiar type turn pale. There, if one will—in the dauntless fusions to come—is the personal drama of the future."

INTRODUCTION

The Turn of the Screw is, without doubt, James's best known and most widely read story. He was fond of writing ghost stories. He liked to refer to them as "bugaboo stories," but whenever he discussed the genre critically, suggested that the ghost story was the modern equivalent of the fairy story. In *The Turn of the Screw*, however, he was attempting a study of the normal reactions of normal people to an abstract, supernatural evil. He makes a point of never particularising the evil, intending to make "the reader's general vision of evil intense," and to "make him think the evil, make him think it for himself." In *The Triple Thinkers* Mr. Edmund Wilson has written a brilliantly ingenious study of *The Turn of the Screw* which he suggests was a Freudian fantasy. He bases his essay partly on the fact that the ghost of the butler, Quint, always appears on the tower and that of the governess, beside the lake. The living governess who has these supernatural visitations, Mr. Wilson suggests, was an hysterical psychotic. It is possible that James's subconscious conceived the story in this way, but from the letters which James and H. G. Wells exchanged about the story, and from the preface to it, there is no reason to suppose that it was not what James described it as being—"a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an *amusette* to catch those not easily caught . . . the jaded, the disillusioned, the fastidious."

Nearly half of Henry James's fiction is composed of stories of various lengths ; the long short story was a form he loved—"the dear, the blessed *nouvelle*" he called it—and the best of his stories rank among his finest work. Often they would be like sculptor's *maquettes*, new techniques or themes would first be tried out in his stories, and later in his novels. They suited his temperament specially well because he was always interested in "the particular case" and the unique circumstance ; one subject could be studied intimately. His difficulty always seems to have been not to drown his fragile anecdote with complicated developments and yet to make it bristle with "vivid values," knowing all the time that all that is of greatest value in the story "will have been drawn preponderantly from the depths of the designer's own mind." He aimed always to make "chemical reductions and condensations" so that they would be as hard and as shining and as indestructible as a sonnet.

Are his stories indestructible ? Is he among the very greatest of short story writers ? It is undeniable that at his worst he wrote stories which the French would call "*littérature*," stories too neat and calculated in a *literary* way. But I believe that his best stories are among the finest ever written. And almost all are blessedly

INTRODUCTION

readable. In his stories, if not in his novels, James worked very hard to be interesting all the time, to hold the attention and plant his surprises ; he constructed excellent plots which have all the classical requirements of a beginning, a middle and an end. So many people who start their reading of James with his late, difficult novels—and end it there—might have been caught by the endless charm of him, his wit, humour and love of life, if they had begun by reading his short stories. The “ figure in his carpet,” the ultimate meaning of his work, may be an obscure one, but in the stories one can, for the most part, sit back and enjoy them with a complete understanding.

MICHAEL SWAN

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

FLORENCE, *April 5, 1874.*—They told me I should find Italy greatly changed ; and in seven-and-twenty years there is room for changes. But to me everything is so perfectly the same that I seem to be living my youth over again ; all the forgotten impressions of that enchanting time come back to me. At the moment they were powerful enough ; but they afterwards faded away. What in the world became of them ? What ever becomes of such things, in the long intervals of consciousness ? Where do they hide themselves away ? In what unvisited cupboards and crannies of our being do they preserve themselves ? They are like the lines of a letter written in sympathetic ink ; hold the letter to the fire for a while and the grateful warmth brings out the invisible words. It is the warmth of this yellow sun of Florence that has been restoring the text of my own young romance ; the thing has been lying before me to-day as a clear, fresh page. There have been moments during the last ten years when I have felt so portentously old, so fagged and finished that I should have taken as a very bad joke any intimation that this present sense of juvenility was still in store for me. It won't last at any rate ; so I had better make the best of it. But I confess it surprises me. I have led too serious a life ; but that perhaps, after all, preserves one's youth. At all events, I have travelled too far, I have worked too hard, I have lived in brutal climates and associated with tiresome people. When a man has reached his fifty-second year without being, materially, the worse for wear—when he has fair health, a fair fortune, a tidy conscience and a complete exemption from embarrassing relatives—I suppose he is bound, in delicacy, to write himself happy. But I confess I shirk this obligation. I have not been miserable ; I won't go so far as to say that—or at least as to write it. But happiness—positive happiness—would have been something different. I don't know that it would have been better, by all measurements—that it would have left me better off at the present time. But it certainly would have made this difference—that I should not have been reduced, in pursuit of pleasant images, to disinter a buried episode of more than a quarter of a century ago. I should have found entertainment more—what shall I call it ?—more contemporaneous, I should have had a wife and children, and I should not be in the way of making, as the French say, infidelities to the present. Of course it's a great gain to have had an escape, not to have committed ,

an act of thumping folly ; and I suppose that, whatever serious step one might have taken at twenty-five, after a struggle, and with a violent effort, and however one's conduct might appear to be justified by events, there would always remain a certain element of regret ; a certain sense of loss lurking in the sense of gain ; a tendency to wonder, rather wishfully, what *might* have been. What might have been, in this case, would, without doubt, have been very sad, and what has been has been very cheerful and comfortable ; but there are nevertheless two or three questions I might ask myself. Why, for instance, have I never married—why have I never been able to care for any woman as I cared for that one ? Ah, why are the mountains blue and why is the sunshine warm ? Happiness mitigated by impertinent conjectures—that's about my ticket.

6th.—I knew it wouldn't last ; it's already passing away. But I have spent a delightful day ; I have been strolling all over the place. Everything reminds me of something else, and yet of itself at the same time ; my imagination makes a great circuit and comes back to the starting-point. There is that well-remembered odour of spring in the air, and the flowers, as they used to be, are gathered into great sheaves and stacks, all along the rugged base of the Strozzi Palace. I wandered for an hour in the Boboli Gardens ; we went there several times together. I remembered all those days individually ; they seem to me as yesterday. I found the corner where she always chose to sit—the bench of sun-warmed marble, in front of the screen of ilex, with that exuberant statue of Pomona just beside it. The place is exactly the same, except that poor Pomona has lost one of her tapering fingers. I sat there for half an hour, and it was strange how near to me she seemed. The place was perfectly empty—that is, it was filled with *her*. I closed my eyes and listened ; I could almost hear the rustle of her dress on the gravel. Why do we make such an ado about death ? What is it after all but a sort of refinement of life ? She died ten years ago, and yet, as I sat there in the sunny stillness, she was a palpable, audible presence. I went afterwards into the gallery of the palace, and wandered for an hour from room to room. The same great pictures hung in the same places and the same dark frescoes arched above them. Twice, of old, I went there with her ; she had a great understanding of art. She understood all sorts of things. Before the Madonna of the Chair I stood for a long time. The face is not a particle like hers, and yet it reminded me of her. But everything does that. We stood and looked at it together once for half an hour ; I remember perfectly what she said.

8th.—Yesterday I felt blue—blue and bored ; and when I got up this morning I had half a mind to leave Florence. But I went out into the street, beside the Arno, and looked up and down—looked at the yellow river and the violet hills, and then decided to remain—or rather, I decided nothing. I simply stood gazing at the beauty of Florence, and before I had gazed my fill I was in good-humour again, and it was too late to start for Rome. I strolled along the quay, where something presently happened that rewarded me for staying. I stopped in front of a little jeweller's shop, where a great many objects in mosaic were exposed in the window ; I stood there for some minutes—I don't know why, for I have no taste for mosaic. In a moment a little girl came and stood beside me—a little girl with a frowsy Italian head, carrying a basket. I turned away, but, as I turned, my eyes happened to fall on her basket. It was covered with a napkin, and on the napkin was pinned a piece of paper, inscribed with an address. This address caught my glance—there was a name on it I knew. It was very legibly written—evidently by a scribe who had made up in zeal what was lacking in skill. *Contessa Salvi-Scarabelli, Via Ghibellina*—so ran the superscription ; I looked at it for some moments ; it caused me a sudden emotion. Presently the little girl, becoming aware of my attention, glanced up at me, wondering, with a pair of timid brown eyes.

"Are you carrying your basket to the Countess Salvi ?" I asked. The child stared at me. "To the Countess Scarabelli."

"Do you know the Countess ?"

"Know her?" murmured the child, with an air of small dismay.

"I mean, have you seen her ?"

"Yes, I have seen her." And then, in a moment, with a sudden soft smile—"E bella!" said the little girl. She was beautiful herself as she said it.

"Precisely ; and is she fair or dark ?"

The child kept gazing at me. "*Bionda—bionda*," she answered, looking about into the golden sunshine for a comparison.

"And is she young ?"

"She is not young—like me. But she is not old like—like—"

"Like me, eh ? And is she married ?"

The little girl began to look wise. "I have never seen the Signor Conté."

"And she lives in Via Ghibellina ?"

"*Sicuro*. In a beautiful palace."

I had one more question to ask, and I pointed it with certain copper coins. "Tell me a little—is she good ?"

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

The child inspected a moment the contents of her little brown fist. "It's you who are good," she answered.

"Ah, but the Countess?" I repeated.

My informant lowered her big brown eyes, with an air of conscientious meditation that was inexpressibly quaint. "To me she appears so," she said at last, looking up.

"Ah, then she must be so," I said, "because, for your age, you are very intelligent." And having delivered myself of this compliment I walked away and left the little girl counting her *soldi*.

I walked back to the hotel, wondering how I could learn something about the Contessa Salvi-Scarabelli. In the doorway I found the innkeeper, and near him stood a young man whom I immediately perceived to be a compatriot and with whom, apparently, he had been in conversation.

"I wonder whether you can give me a piece of information," I said to the landlord. "Do you know anything about the Count Salvi-Scarabelli?"

The landlord looked down at his boots, then slowly raised his shoulders, with a melancholy smile. "I have many regrets, dear sir—"

"You don't know the name?"

"I know the name, assuredly. But I don't know the gentleman."

I saw that my question had attracted the attention of the young Englishman, who looked at me with a good deal of earnestness. He was apparently satisfied with what he saw, for he presently decided to speak.

"The Count Scarabelli is dead," he said, very gravely.

I looked at him a moment; he was a pleasing young fellow. "And his widow lives," I observed, "in Via Ghibellina?"

"I daresay that is the name of the street." He was a handsome young Englishman, but he was also an awkward one; he wondered who I was and what I wanted, and he did me the honour to perceive that, as regards those points, my appearance was reassuring. But he hesitated, very properly, to talk with a perfect stranger about a lady whom he knew, and he had not the art to conceal his hesitation. I instantly felt it to be singular that though he regarded me as a perfect stranger, I had not the same feeling about him. Whether it was that I had seen him before, or simply that I was struck with his agreeable young face—at any rate I felt myself, as they say here, in sympathy with him. If I have seen him before I don't remember the occasion, and neither, apparently, does he; I suppose it's only a part of the feeling I have had the last three days about everything. It was this

feeling that made me suddenly act as if I had known him a long time.

"Do you know the Countess Salvi?" I asked.

He looked at me a little, and then, without resenting the freedom of my question—"The Countess Scarabelli you mean," he said.

"Yes," I answered; "she's the daughter."

"The daughter is a little girl."

"She must be grown up now. She must be—let me see—close upon thirty."

My young Englishman began to smile. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"I was speaking of the daughter," I said, understanding his smile. "But I was thinking of the mother."

"Of the mother?"

"Of a person I knew twenty-seven years ago—the most charming woman I have ever known. She was the Countess Salvi—she lived in a wonderful old house in Via Ghibellina."

"A wonderful old house!" my young Englishman repeated.

"She had a little girl," I went on; "and the little girl was very fair, like her mother; and the mother and daughter had the same name—Bianca." I stopped and looked at my companion, and he blushed a little. "And Bianca Salvi," I continued, "was the most charming woman in the world." He blushed a little more, and I laid my hand on his shoulder. "Do you know why I tell you this? Because you remind me of what I was when I knew her—when I loved her." My poor young Englishman gazed at me with a sort of embarrassed and fascinated stare, and still I went on. "I say that's the reason I told you this—but you'll think it a strange reason. You remind me of my younger self. You needn't resent that—I was a charming young fellow. The Countess Salvi thought so. Her daughter thinks the same of you."

Instantly, instinctively he raised his hand to my arm. "Truly?"

"Ah, you are wonderfully like me!" I said, laughing. "That was just my state of mind. I wanted tremendously to please her." He dropped his hand and looked away, smiling, but with an air of ingenuous confusion which quickened my interest in him. "You don't know what to make of me," I pursued. "You don't know why a stranger should suddenly address you in this way and pretend to read your thoughts. Doubtless you think me a little cracked. Perhaps I am eccentric; but it's not so bad as that. I have lived about the world a great deal, following my profession, which is that of a soldier. I have been in India, in Africa, in

hung round with faded tapestry, paved with bare tiles, and furnished only with three chairs. In the drawing-room, above the fireplace, is a superb Andrea del Sarto. The furniture is covered with pale sea-green."

My companion listened to all this.

"The Andrea del Sarto is there ; it's magnificent. But the furniture is in pale red."

"Ah, they have changed it then—in twenty-seven years."

"And there's a portrait of Madame de Salvi," continued my friend.

I was silent a moment. "I should like to see that."

He too was silent. Then he asked, "Why don't you go and see it ? If you knew the mother so well, why don't you call upon the daughter ?"

"From what you tell me I am afraid."

"What have I told you to make you afraid ?"

I looked a little at his ingenuous countenance. "The mother was a very dangerous woman."

The young Englishman began to blush again. "The daughter is not," he said.

"Are you very sure ?"

He didn't say he was sure, but he presently inquired in what way the Countess Salvi had been dangerous.

"You must not ask me that," I answered ; "for, after all, I desire to remember only what was good in her." And as we walked back I begged him to render me the service of mentioning my name to his friend, and of saying that I had known her mother well and that I asked permission to come and see her.

gth.—I have seen that poor boy half-a-dozen times again, and a most amiable young fellow he is. He continues to represent to me, in the most extraordinary manner, my own young identity ; the correspondence is perfect at all points, save that he is a better boy than I. He is evidently acutely interested in his Countess, and leads quite the same life with her that I led with Madame de Salvi. He goes to see her every evening and stays half the night ; these Florentines keep the most extraordinary hours. I remember, towards 3 a.m., Madame de Salvi used to turn me out. "Come, come," she would say, "it's time to go. If you were to stay later people might talk." I don't know at what time he comes home, but I suppose his evening seems as short as mine did. To-day he brought me a message from his Contessa—a very gracious little speech. She remembered often to have heard her mother speak of me—she called me her English friend. All her mother's friends were dear to her, and she begged I would do her the honour to

come and see her. She is always at home of an evening. Poor young Stanmer (he is of the Devonshire Stanmers—a great property) reported this speech verbatim, and of course it can't in the least signify to him that a poor grizzled, battered soldier, old enough to be his father, should come to call upon his *innamorata*. But I remember how it used to matter to me when other men came ; that's a point of difference. However, it's only because I'm so old. At twenty-five I shouldn't have been afraid of myself at fifty-two. Camerino was thirty-four—and then the others ! She was always at home in the evening, and they all used to come. They were old Florentine names. But she used to let me stay after them all ; she thought an old English name as good. What a transcendent coquette ! . . . But *basta cosi*, as she used to say. I meant to go to-night to Casa Salvi, but I couldn't bring myself to the point. I don't know what I'm afraid of ; I used to be in a hurry enough to go there once. I suppose I am afraid of the very look of the place—of the old rooms, the old walls. I shall go to-morrow night. I am afraid of the very echoes.

10th.—She has the most extraordinary resemblance to her mother. When I went in I was tremendously startled ; I stood staring at her. I have just come home ; it is past midnight ; I have been all the evening at Casa Salvi. It is very warm—my window is open—I can look out on the river, gliding past in the starlight. So, of old, when I came home, I used to stand and look out. There are the same cypresses on the opposite hills.

Poor young Stanmer was there, and three or four other admirers ; they all got up when I came in. I think I had been talked about, and there was some curiosity. But why should I have been talked about ? They were youngish men—none of them of my time. She is a wonderful likeness of her mother ; I couldn't get over it. Beautiful like her mother, and yet with the same faults in her face ; but with her mother's perfect head and brow and sympathetic, almost pitying, eyes. Her face has just that peculiarity of her mother's, which, of all human countenances that I have ever known, was the one that passed most quickly and completely from the expression of gaiety to that of repose. Repose, in her face, always suggested sadness ; and while you were watching it with a kind of awe, and wondering of what tragic secret it was the token, it kindled, on the instant, into a radiant Italian smile. The Countess Scarabelli's smiles to-night, however, were almost uninterrupted. She greeted me—divinely, as her mother used to do ; and young Stanmer sat in the corner of the sofa—as I used to do—and watched her while she talked. She is thin and very fair, and was dressed in light, vaporous black :

that completes the resemblance. The house, the rooms, are almost absolutely the same ; there may be changes of detail, but they don't modify the general effect. There are the same precious pictures on the walls of the salon—the same great dusky fresco in the concave ceiling. The daughter is not rich, I suppose, any more than the mother. The furniture is worn and faded, and I was admitted by a solitary servant who carried a twinkling taper before me up the great dark marble staircase.

"I have often heard of you," said the Countess, as I sat down near her ; "my mother often spoke of you."

"Often ?" I answered. "I am surprised at that."

"Why are you surprised ? Were you not good friends ?"

"Yes, for a certain time—very good friends. But I was sure she had forgotten me."

"She never forgot," said the Countess, looking at me intently and smiling. "She was not like that."

"She was not like most other women in any way," I declared.

"Ah, she was charming," cried the Countess, rattling open her fan. "I have always been very curious to see you. I have received an impression of you."

"A good one, I hope."

She looked at me, laughing, and not answering this : it was just her mother's trick.

"My Englishman," she used to call you—'*il mio inglese*.'"

"I hope she spoke of me kindly," I insisted.

The Countess, still laughing, gave a little shrug, balancing her hand to and fro. "So-so ; I always supposed you had had a quarrel. You don't mind my being frank like this—eh ?"

"I delight in it ; it reminds me of your mother."

"Every one tells me that. But I am not clever like her. You will see for yourself."

"That speech," I said, "completes the resemblance. She was always pretending she was not clever, and in reality—"

"In reality she was an angel, eh ? To escape from dangerous comparisons I will admit then that I am clever. That will make a difference. But let us talk of you. You are very—how shall I say it ?—very eccentric."

"Is that what your mother told you ?"

"To tell the truth, she spoke of you as a great original. But aren't all Englishmen eccentric ? All except that one !" and the Countess pointed to poor Stanmer, in his corner of the sofa.

"Oh, I know just what he is," I said.

"He's as quiet as a lamb—he's like all the world," cried the Countess.

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"Like all the world—yes. He is in love with you."

She looked at me with sudden gravity. "I don't object to your saying that for all the world—but I do for him."

"Well," I went on, "he is peculiar in this : he is rather afraid of you."

Instantly she began to smile ; she turned her face towards Stanmer. He had seen that we were talking about him ; he coloured and got up—then came toward us.

"I like men who are afraid of nothing," said our hostess.

"I know what you want," I said to Stanmer. "You want to know what the Signora Contessa says about you."

Stanmer looked straight into her face, very gravely. "I don't care a straw what she says."

"You are almost a match for the Signora Contessa," I answered. "She declares she doesn't care a pin's head what you think."

"I recognise the Countess's style !" Stanmer exclaimed, turning away.

"One would think," said the Countess, "that you were trying to make a quarrel between us."

I watched him move away to another part of the great salon ; he stood in front of the Andrea del Sarto, looking up at it. But he was not seeing it ; he was listening to what we might say. I often stood there in just that way. "He can't quarrel with you, any more than I could have quarrelled with your mother."

"Ah, but you did. Something painful passed between you."

"Yes, it was painful, but it was not a quarrel. I went away one day and never saw her again. That was all."

The Countess looked at me gravely. "What do you call it when a man does that ?"

"It depends upon the case."

"Sometimes," said the Countess in French, "it's a *lâcheté*."

"Yes, and sometimes, it's an act of wisdom."

"And sometimes," rejoined the Countess, "it's a mistake."

I shook my head. "For me it was no mistake."

She began to laugh again. "Caro Signore, you're a great original. What had my poor mother done to you ?"

I looked at our young Englishman, who still had his back turned to us and was staring up at the picture. "I will tell you some other time," I said.

"I shall certainly remind you ; I am very curious to know." Then she opened and shut her fan two or three times, still looking at me. What eyes they have ! "Tell me a little," she went on, "if I may ask without indiscretion. Are you married ?"

"No, Signora Contessa."

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"Isn't that at least a mistake?"

"Do I look very unhappy?"

She dropped her head a little to one side. "For an Englishman—no!"

"Ah," said I, laughing, "you are quite as clever as your mother."

"And they tell me that you are a great soldier," she continued; "you have lived in India. It was very kind of you, so far away, to have remembered our poor dear Italy."

"One always remembers Italy; the distance makes no difference. I remembered it well the day I heard of your mother's death!"

"Ah, that was a sorrow!" said the Countess. "There's not a day that I don't weep for her. But *che vuole*? She's a saint in paradise."

"*Sicuro*," I answered; and I looked some time at the ground. "But tell me about yourself, dear lady," I asked at last, raising my eyes. "You have also had the sorrow of losing your husband."

"I am a poor widow, as you see. *Che vuole*? My husband died after three years of marriage."

I waited for her to remark that the late Count Scarabelli was also a saint in paradise, but I waited in vain.

"That was like your distinguished father," I said.

"Yes, he too died young. I can't be said to have known him; I was but of the age of my own little girl. But I weep for him all the more."

Again I was silent for a moment.

"It was in India too," I said presently, "that I heard of your mother's second marriage."

The Countess raised her eyebrows.

"In India, then, one hears of everything! Did that news please you?"

"Well, since you ask me—no."

"I understand that," said the Countess, looking at her open fan. "I shall not marry again like that."

"That's what your mother said to me," I ventured to observe.

She was not offended, but she rose from her seat and stood looking at me a moment. Then:

"You should not have gone away!" she exclaimed.

I stayed for another hour; it is a very pleasant house. Two or three of the men who were sitting there seemed very civil and intelligent; one of them was a major of engineers, who offered me a profusion of information upon the new organisation of the Italian army. While he talked, however, I was observing our

hostess, who was talking with the others ; very little, I noticed, with her young Inglese. She is altogether charming—full of frankness and freedom, of that inimitable *disinvoltura*, which in an Englishwoman would be vulgar, and which in her is simply the perfection of apparent spontaneity. But for all her spontaneity she's as subtle as a needle-point, and knows tremendously well what she is about. If she is not a consummate coquette . . . What had she in her head when she said that I should not have gone away ?—Poor little Stanmer didn't go away. I left him there at midnight.

12th.—I found him to-day sitting in the church of Santa Croce, into which I wandered to escape from the heat of the sun.

In the nave it was cool and dim ; he was staring at the blaze of candles on the great altar, and thinking, I am sure, of his incomparable Countess. I sat down beside him, and after a while, as if to avoid the appearance of eagerness, he asked me how I had enjoyed my visit to Casa Salvi, and what I thought of the *padrona*.

"I think half-a-dozen things," I said ; "but I can only tell you one now. She's an enchantress. You shall hear the rest when we have left the church."

"An enchantress ?" repeated Stanmer, looking at me askance. He is a very simple youth, but who am I to blame him ?

"A charmer," I said ; "a fascinatress !"

He turned away, staring at the altar-candles.

"An artist—an actress," I went on, rather brutally.

He gave me another glance.

"I think you are telling me all," he said.

"No, no, there is more." And we sat a long time in silence.

At last he proposed that we should go out ; and we passed into the street, where the shadows had begun to stretch themselves.

"I don't know what you mean by her being an actress," he said, as we turned homeward.

"I suppose not. Neither should I have known, if any one had said that to me."

"You are thinking about the mother," said Stanmer. "Why are you always bringing *her* in ?"

"My dear boy, the analogy is so great ; it forces itself upon me."

He stopped, and stood looking at me with his modest, perplexed young face. I thought he was going to exclaim, "The analogy be hanged !" but he said after a moment :

"Well, what does it prove ?"

"I can't say it proves anything ; but it suggests a great many things."

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"Be so good as to mention a few," he said, as we walked on.

"You are not sure of her yourself," I began.

"Never mind that—go on with your analogy."

"That's a part of it. You *are* very much in love with her."

"That's a part of it too, I suppose?"

"Yes, as I have told you before. You are in love with her, and yet you can't make her out; that's just where I was with regard to Madame de Salvi."

"And she too was an enchantress, an actress, an artist, and all the rest of it?"

"She was the most perfect coquette I ever knew, and the most dangerous, because the most finished."

"What you mean, then, is that her daughter is a finished coquette?"

"I rather think so."

Stanmer walked along for some moments in silence.

"Seeing that you suppose me to be a—a great admirer of the Countess," he said at last, "I am rather surprised at the freedom with which you speak of her."

I confessed that I was surprised at it myself. "But it's on account of the interest I take in you."

"I am immensely obliged to you!" said the poor boy.

"Ah, of course you don't like it. That is, you like my interest—I don't see how you can help liking that; but you don't like my freedom. That's natural enough; but, my dear young friend, I want only to help you. If a man had said to me—so many years ago—what I am saying to you, I should certainly also, at first, have thought him a great brute. But, after a little, I should have been grateful—I should have felt that he was helping me."

"You seem to have been very well able to help yourself," said Stanmer. "You tell me you made your escape."

"Yes, but it was at the cost of infinite perplexity—of what I may call keen suffering. I should like to save you all that."

"I can only repeat—it is really very kind of you."

"Don't repeat it too often, or I shall begin to think you don't mean it."

"Well," said Stanmer, "I think this, at any rate—that you take an extraordinary responsibility in trying to put a man out of conceit of a woman who, as he believes, may make him very happy."

I grasped his arm, and we stopped, going on with our talk like a couple of Florentines

"Do you wish to marry her?"

He looked away, without meeting my eyes. "It's a great responsibility," he repeated.

"Before Heaven," I said, "I would have married the mother ! You are exactly in my situation."

"Don't you think you rather overdo the analogy ?" asked poor Stanmer.

"A little more, a little less—it doesn't matter. I believe you are in my shoes. But of course if you prefer it I will beg a thousand pardons and leave them to carry you where they will."

He had been looking away, but now he slowly turned his face and met my eyes. "You have gone too far to retreat ; what is it you know about her ?"

"About this one—nothing. But about the other—"

"I care nothing about the other !"

"My dear fellow," I said, "they are mother and daughter—they are as like as two of Andrea's Madonnas."

"If they resemble each other, then, you were simply mistaken in the mother."

I took his arm and we walked on again ; there seemed no adequate reply to such a charge. "Your state of mind brings back my own so completely," I said presently. "You admire her—you adore her, and yet, secretly, you mistrust her. You are enchanted with her personal charm, her grace, her wit, her everything ; and yet in your private heart you are afraid of her."

"Afraid of her ?"

"Your mistrust keeps rising to the surface ; you can't rid yourself of the suspicion that at the bottom of all things she is hard and cruel, and you would be immensely relieved if some one should persuade you that your suspicion is right."

Stanmer made no direct reply to this ; but before we reached the hotel he said, "What did you ever know about the mother ?"

"It's a terrible story," I answered.

He looked at me askance. "What did she do ?"

"Come to my rooms this evening and I will tell you."

He declared he would, but he never came. Exactly the way I should have acted !

14th.—I went again, last evening, to Casa Salvi, where I found the same little circle, with the addition of a couple of ladies. Stanmer was there, trying hard to talk to one of them, but making, I am sure, a very poor business of it. The Countess—well, the Countess was admirable. She greeted me like a friend of ten years, toward whom familiarity should not have engendered a want of ceremony ; she made me sit near her, and she asked me a dozen questions about my health and my occupations.

"I live in the past," I said. "I go into the galleries, into the old places and the churches. To-day I spent an hour in Michael Angelo's chapel, at San Lorenzo."

"Ah, yes, that's the past," said the Countess. "Those things are very old."

"Twenty-seven years old," I answered.

"Twenty-seven? *Altro!*"

"I mean my own past," I said. "I went to a great many of those places with your mother."

"Ah, the pictures are beautiful," murmured the Countess, glancing at Stanmer.

"Have you lately looked at any of them?" I asked. "Have you gone to the galleries with *him*?"

She hesitated a moment, smiling. "It seems to me that your question is a little impertinent. But I think you are like that."

"A little impertinent? Never. As I say, your mother did me the honour more than once, to accompany me to the Uffizzi."

"My mother must have been very kind to you."

"So it seemed to me at the time."

"At the time, only?"

"Well, if you prefer, so it seems to me now."

"Eh," said the Countess, "she made sacrifices."

"To what, *cara Signora*? She was perfectly free. Your lamented father was dead—and she had not yet contracted her second marriage."

"If she was intending to marry again, it was all the more reason she should have been careful."

I looked at her a moment; she met my eyes gravely, over the top of her fan. "Are *you* very careful?" I said.

She dropped her fan with a certain violence. "Ah, yes, you are impertinent!"

"Ah, no," I said. "Remember that I am old enough to be your father; that I knew you when you were three years old. I may surely ask such questions. But you are right; one must do your mother justice. She was certainly thinking of her second marriage."

"You have not forgiven her that!" said the Countess, very gravely.

"Have you?" I asked, more lightly.

"I don't judge my mother. That is a mortal sin. My step-father was very kind to me."

"I remember him," I said; "I saw him a great many times—your mother already received him."

My hostess sat with lowered eyes, saying nothing ; but she presently looked up.

"She was very unhappy with my father."

"That I can easily believe. And your step-father—is he still living?"

"He died—before my mother."

"Did he fight any more duels?"

"He was killed in a duel," said the Countess, discreetly.

It seems almost monstrous, especially as I can give no reason for it—but this announcement, instead of shocking me, caused me to feel a strange exhilaration. Most assuredly, after all these years, I bear the poor man no resentment. Of course I controlled my manner, and simply remarked to the Countess that as his fault had been, so was his punishment. I think, however, that the feeling of which I speak was at the bottom of my saying to her that I hoped that, unlike her mother's, her own brief married life had been happy.

"If it was not," she said, "I have forgotten it now."—I wonder if the late Count Scarabelli was also killed in a duel, and if his adversary. . . . Is it on the books that his adversary, as well, shall perish by the pistol? Which of those gentlemen is he, I wonder? Is it reserved for poor little Stanmer to put a bullet into him? No; poor little Stanmer, I trust, will do as I did. And yet, unfortunately for him, that woman is consummately plausible. She was wonderfully nice last evening; she was really irresistible. Such frankness and freedom, and yet something so soft and womanly; such graceful gaiety, so much of the brightness, without any of the stiffness, of good breeding, and over it all something so picturesquely simple and southern. She is a perfect Italian. But she comes honestly by it. After the talk I have just jotted down she changed her place, and the conversation for half an hour was general. Stanmer indeed said very little; partly, I suppose, because he is shy of talking a foreign tongue. Was I like that—was I so constantly silent? I suspect I was when I was perplexed, and Heaven knows that very often my perplexity was extreme. Before I went away I had a few more words *tête-à-tête* with the Countess.

"I hope you are not leaving Florence yet," she said; "you will stay a while longer?"

I answered that I came only for a week, and that my week was over.

"I stay on from day to-day, I am so much interested."

"Eh, it's the beautiful moment. I'm glad our city pleases you!"

"Florence pleases me—and I take a paternal interest in our

young friend," I added, glancing at Stanmer. "I have become very fond of him."

"*Bel tipo inglese*," said my hostess. "And he is very intelligent ; he has a beautiful mind."

She stood there resting her smile and her clear, expressive eyes upon me.

"I don't like to praise him too much," I rejoined, "lest I should appear to praise myself ; he reminds me so much of what I was at his age. If your beautiful mother were to come to life for an hour she would see the resemblance."

She gave me a little amused stare.

"And yet you don't look at all like him !"

"Ah, you didn't know me when I was twenty-five. I was very handsome ! And moreover, it isn't that, it's the mental resemblance. I was ingenuous, candid, trusting, like him."

"Trusting ? I remember my mother once telling me that you were the most suspicious and jealous of men !"

"I fell into a suspicious mood, but I was, fundamentally, not in the least addicted to thinking evil. I couldn't easily imagine any harm of any one."

"And so you mean that Mr. Stanmer is in a suspicious mood ?"

"Well, I mean that his situation is the same as mine."

The Countess gave me one of her serious looks.

"Come," she said, "what was it—this famous situation of yours ? I have heard you mention it before."

"Your mother might have told you, since she occasionally did me the honour to speak of me."

"All my mother ever told me was that you were a sad puzzle to her."

At this, of course, I laughed out—I laugh still as I write it.

"Well, then, that was my situation—I was a sad puzzle to a very clever woman."

"And you mean, therefore, that I am a puzzle to poor Mr. Stanmer ?"

"He is racking his brains to make you out. Remember it was you who said he was intelligent."

She looked round at him, and as fortune would have it, his appearance at that moment quite confirmed my assertion. He was lounging back in his chair with an air of indolence rather too marked for a drawing-room, and staring at the ceiling with the expression of a man who has just been asked a conundrum. Madame Scarabelli seemed struck with his attitude.

"Don't you see," I said, "he can't read the riddle ?"

"You yourself," she answered, "said he was incapable of

thinking evil. I should be sorry to have him think any evil of *me*."

And she looked straight at me—seriously, appealingly—with her beautiful candid brow.

I inclined myself, smiling, in a manner which might have meant:

"How could that be possible?"

"I have a great esteem for him," she went on; "I want him to think well of me. If I am a puzzle to him, do me a little service. Explain me to him."

"Explain you, dear lady?"

"You are older and wiser than he. Make him understand me."

She looked deep into my eyes for a moment, and then she turned away.

26th.—I have written nothing for a good many days, but meanwhile I have been half-a-dozen times to Casa Salvi. I have seen a good deal also of my young friend—had a good many walks and talks with him. I have proposed to him to come with me to Venice for a fortnight, but he won't listen to the idea of leaving Florence. He is very happy in spite of his doubts, and I confess that in the perception of his happiness I have lived over again my own. This is so much the case that when, the other day, he at last made up his mind to ask me to tell him the wrong that Madame de Salvi had done me, I rather checked his curiosity. I told him that if he was bent upon knowing I would satisfy him, but that it seemed a pity, just now, to indulge in painful imagery.

"But I thought you wanted so much to put me out of conceit of our friend."

"I admit I am inconsistent, but there are various reasons for it. In the first place—it's obvious—I am open to the charge of playing a double game. I profess an admiration for the Countess Scarbelli, for I accept her hospitality, and at the same time I attempt to poison your mind; isn't that the proper expression? I can't exactly make up my mind to that, though my admiration for the Countess and my desire to prevent you from taking a foolish step are equally sincere. And then, in the second place you seem to me on the whole so happy! One hesitates to destroy an illusion, no matter how pernicious, that is so delightful while it lasts. These are the rare moments of life. To be young and ardent, in the midst of an Italian spring, and to believe in the moral perfection of a beautiful woman—what an admirable situation! Float with the current; I'll stand on the brink and watch you."

"Your real reason is that you feel you have no case against the poor lady," said Stanmer. "You admire her as much as I do."

"I just admitted that I admired her. I never said she was a

vulgar flirt ; her mother was an absolutely scientific one. Heaven knows I admired that ! It's a nice point, however, how much one is bound in honour not to warn a young friend against a dangerous woman because one also has relations of civility with the lady."

"In such a case," said Stanmer, "I would break off my relations."

I looked at him, and I think I laughed.

"Are you jealous of me, by chance ?"

He shook his head emphatically.

"Not in the least ; I like to see you there, because your conduct contradicts your words."

"I have always said that the Countess is fascinating."

"Otherwise," said Stanmer, "in the case you speak of I would give the lady notice."

"Give her notice ?"

"Mention to her that you regard her with suspicion, and that you propose to do your best to rescue a simple-minded youth from her wiles. That would be more loyal." And he began to laugh again.

It is not the first time he has laughed at me ; but I have never minded it, because I have always understood it.

"Is that what you recommend me to say to the Countess ?" I asked.

"Recommend you !" he exclaimed, laughing again ; "I recommend nothing. I may be the victim to be rescued, but I am at least not a partner to the conspiracy. Besides," he added in a moment, "the Countess knows your state of mind."

"Has she told you so ?"

Stanmer hesitated.

"She has begged me to listen to everything you may say against her. She declared that she has a good conscience."

"Ah," said I, "she's an accomplished woman !"

And it is indeed very clever of her to take that tone. Stanmer afterwards assured me explicitly that he has never given her a hint of the liberties I have taken in conversation with—what shall I call it?—with her moral nature ; she has guessed them for herself. She must hate me intensely, and yet her manner has always been charming to me ! She is truly an accomplished woman !

May 4th.—I have stayed away from Casa Salvi for a week, but I have lingered on in Florence, under a mixture of impulses. I have had it on my conscience not to go near the Countess again—and yet from the moment she is aware of the way I feel about her, it is open war. There need be no scruples on either side. She is as

free to use every possible art to entangle poor Stanmer more closely as I am to clip her fine-spun meshes. Under the circumstances, however, we naturally shouldn't meet very cordially. But as regards her meshes, why, after all, should I clip them? It would really be very interesting to see Stanmer swallowed up. I should like to see how he would agree with her after she had devoured him—(to what vulgar imagery, by the way, does curiosity reduce a man!) Let him finish the story in his own way, as I finished it in mine. It is the same story; but why, a quarter of a century later, should it have the same *dénouement*? Let him make his own *dénouement*.

5th.—Hang it, however, I don't want the poor boy to be miserable.

6th.—Ah, but did my *dénouement* then prove such a happy one?

7th.—He came to my room late last night; he was much excited.

"What was it she did to you?" he asked.

I answered him first with another question. "Have you quarrelled with the Countess?"

But he only repeated his own. "What was it she did to you?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you." And he sat there beside the candle, staring at me. "There was a man always there—Count Camerino."

"The man she married?"

"The man she married. I was very much in love with her, and yet I didn't trust her. I was sure that she lied; I believed that she could be cruel. Nevertheless, at moments, she had a charm which made it pure pedantry to be conscious of her faults; and while these moments lasted I would have done anything for her. Unfortunately, they didn't last long. But you know what I mean; am I not describing the Scarabelli?"

"The Countess Scarabelli never lied!" cried Stanmer.

"That's just what I would have said to any one who should have made the insinuation! But I suppose you are not asking me the question you put to me just now from dispassionate curiosity."

"A man may want to know!" said the innocent fellow.

I couldn't help laughing out. "This, at any rate, is my story. Camerino was always there; he was a sort of fixture in the house. If I had moments of dislike for the divine Bianca, I had no moments of liking for him. And yet he was a very agreeable fellow, very civil, very intelligent, not in the least disposed to make a quarrel with me. The trouble of course was simply that I was jealous of him. I don't know, however, on what ground I could have quarrelled with him, for I had no definite rights.

I can't say what I expected—I can't say what, as the matter stood, I was prepared to do. With my name and my prospects, I might perfectly have offered her my hand. I am not sure that she would have accepted it—I am by no means clear that she wanted that. But she wanted, wanted keenly, to attach me to her ; she wanted to have me about. I should have been capable of giving up everything—England, my career, my family—simply to devote myself to her, to live near her and see her every day."

"Why didn't you do it, then?" asked Stanmer.

"Why don't you?"

"To be a proper rejoinder to my question," he said, rather neatly, "yours should be asked twenty-five years hence."

"It remains perfectly true that at a given moment I was capable of doing as I say. That was what she wanted—a rich, susceptible, credulous, convenient young Englishman established near her *en permanence*. And yet," I added, "I must do her complete justice. I honestly believe she was fond of me." At this Stanmer got up and walked to the window ; he stood looking out a moment, and then he turned round. "You know she was older than I," I went on. "Madame Scarabelli is older than you. One day in the garden, her mother asked me in angry tone why I disliked Camerino ; for I had been at no pains to conceal my feeling about him, and something had just happened to bring it out. 'I dislike him,' I said, 'because you like him so much.' 'I assure you I don't like him,' she answered. 'He has all the appearance of being your lover,' I retorted. It was a brutal speech, certainly, but any other man in my place would have made it. She took it very strangely ; she turned pale, but she was not indignant. 'How can he be my lover after what he has done?' she asked. 'What has he done?' She hesitated a good while, then she said : 'He killed my husband.' 'Good heavens !' I cried, 'and you receive him?' Do you know what she said? She said, '*Che vuole?*'"

"Is that all?" asked Stanmer.

"No ; she went on to say that Camerino had killed Count Salvi in a duel, and she admitted that her husband's jealousy had been the occasion of it. The Count, it appeared, was a monster of jealousy—he had led her a dreadful life. He himself, meanwhile, had been anything but irreproachable ; he had done a mortal injury to a man of whom he pretended to be a friend, and this affair had become notorious. The gentleman in question had demanded satisfaction for his outraged honour ; but for some reason or other (the Countess, to do her justice, did not tell me that her husband was a coward), he had not as yet obtained it.

The duel with Camerino had come on first ; in an access of jealous fury the Count had struck Camerino in the face ; and this outrage, I know not how justly, was deemed expiable before the other. By an extraordinary arrangement (the Italians have certainly no sense of fair play), the other man was allowed to be Camerino's second. The duel was fought with swords, and the Count received a wound of which, though at first it was not expected to be fatal, he died on the following day. The matter was hushed up as much as possible for the sake of the Countess's good name, and so successfully that it was presently observed that, among the public, the other gentleman had the credit of having put his blade through M. de Salvi. This gentleman took a fancy not to contradict the impression, and it was allowed to subsist. So long as *he* consented, it was of course in Camerino's interest not to contradict it, as it left him much more free to keep up his intimacy with the Countess."

Stanmer had listened to all this with extreme attention. " Why didn't *she* contradict it ? "

I shrugged my shoulders. " I am bound to believe it was for the same reason. I was horrified, at any rate, by the whole story. I was extremely shocked at the Countess's want of dignity in continuing to see the man by whose hand her husband had fallen."

" The husband had been a great brute, and it was not known," said Stanmer.

" Its not being known made no difference. And as for Salvi having been a brute, that is but a way of saying that his wife, and the man whom his wife subsequently married, didn't like him."

Stanmer looked extremely meditative ; his eyes were fixed on mine. " Yes, that marriage is hard to get over. It was not becoming."

" Ah," said I, " what a long breath I drew when I heard of it ! I remember the place and the hour. It was at a hill-station in India, seven years after I had left Florence. The post brought me some English papers, and in one of them was a letter from Italy, with a lot of so-called ' fashionable intelligence.' There, among various scandals in high life, and other delectable items, I read that the Countess Bianca Salvi, famous for some years as the presiding genius of the most agreeable *salon* in Florence, was about to bestow her hand upon Count Camerino, a distinguished Bolognese. Ah, my dear boy, it was a tremendous escape ! I had been ready to marry the woman who was capable of that ! But my instinct had warned me, and I had trusted my instinct."

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

" 'Instinct's everything,' as Falstaff says ! " And Stanmer began to laugh. " Did you tell Madame de Salvi that your instinct was against her ? "

" No ; I told her that she frightened me, shocked me, horrified me. "

" That's about the same thing. And what did she say ? "

" She asked me what I would have ? I called her friendship with Camerino a scandal, and she answered that her husband had been a brute. Besides, no one knew it ; therefore it was no scandal. Just *your* argument ! I retorted that this was odious reasoning, and that she had no moral sense. We had a passionate argument, and I declared I would never see her again. In the heat of my displeasure I left Florence, and I kept my vow. I never saw her again. "

" You couldn't have been much in love with her, " said Stanmer.

" I was not—three months after. "

" If you had been you would have come back—three days after. "

" So doubtless it seems to you. All I can say is that it was the great effort of my life. Being a military man, I have had on various occasions to face the enemy. But it was not then I needed my resolution ; it was when I left Florence in a post-chaise. "

Stanmer turned about the room two or three times, and then he said : " I don't understand ! I don't understand why she should have told you that Camerino had killed her husband. It could only damage her. "

" She was afraid it would damage her more that I should think he was her lover. She wished to say the thing that would most effectually persuade me that he was not her lover—that he could never be. And then she wished to get the credit of being very frank. "

" Good heavens, how you must have analysed her ! " cried my companion, staring.

" There is nothing so analytic as disillusionment. But there it is. She married Camerino. "

" Yes, I don't like that, " said Stanmer. He was silent a while, and then he added—" Perhaps she wouldn't have done so if you had remained. "

He has a little innocent way ! " Very likely she would have dispensed with the ceremony, " I answered dryly.

" Upon my word, " he said, " you *have* analysed her ! "

" You ought to be grateful to me. I have done for you what you seem unable to do for yourself. "

"I don't see any Camerino in my case," he said.

"Perhaps among those gentlemen I can find one for you."

"Thank you," he cried; "I'll take care of that myself!"

And he went away—satisfied, I hope.

10th.—He's an obstinate little wretch; it irritates me to see him sticking to it. Perhaps he is looking for his Camerino. I shall leave him at any rate to his fate; it is growing insupportably hot.

11th.—I went this evening to bid farewell to the Scarabelli. There was no one there; she was alone in her great dusky drawing-room, which was lighted only by a couple of candles, with the immense windows open over the garden. She was dressed in white; she was deucedly pretty. She asked me of course why I had been so long without coming.

"I think you say that only for form," I answered. "I imagine you know."

"Che! what have I done?"

"Nothing at all. You are too wise for that."

She looked at me a while. "I think you are a little crazy."

"Ah no, I am only too sane. I have too much reason rather than too little."

"You have at any rate what we call a fixed idea."

"There is no harm in that so long as it's a good one."

"But yours is abominable!" she exclaimed with a laugh.

"Of course you can't like me or my ideas. All things considered, you have treated me with wonderful kindness, and I thank you and kiss your hands. I leave Florence to-morrow."

"I won't say I'm sorry!" she said, laughing again. "But I am very glad to have seen you. I always wondered about you. You are a curiosity."

"Yes, you must find me so. A man who can resist your charms! The fact is, I can't. This evening you are enchanting; and it is the first time I have been alone with you."

She gave no heed to this; she turned away. But in a moment she came back, and stood looking at me, and her beautiful solemn eyes seemed to shine in the dimness of the room.

"How *could* you treat my mother so?" she asked.

"Treat her so?"

"How could you desert the most charming woman in the world?"

"It was not a case of desertion; and if it had been it seems to me she was consoled." •

At this moment there was the sound of a step in the ante-chamber, and I saw the Countess perceived it to be Stanmer's.

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"That wouldn't have happened," she murmured. "My poor mother needed a protector."

Stanmer came in, interrupting our talk, and looking at me, I thought with a little air of bravado. He must think me indeed a tiresome, meddlesome bore ; and upon my word, turning it all over, I wonder at his docility. After all, he's five-and-twenty—and yet I *must* add, it *does* irritate me—the way he sticks ! He was followed in a moment by two or three of the regular Italians, and I made my visit short.

"Good-bye, Countess," I said ; and she gave me her hand in silence. "Do *you* need a protector ?" I added, softly.

She looked at me from head to foot, and then, almost angrily : "Yes, Signore."

But, to deprecate her anger, I kept her hand an instant, and then bent my venerable head and kissed it. I think I appeased her.

BOLOGNA, 14th.—I left Florence on the 11th, and have been here these three days. Delightful old Italian town—but it lacks the charm of my Florentine secret.

I wrote that last entry five days ago, late at night, after coming back from Casa Salvi. I afterwards fell asleep in my chair ; the night was half over when I woke up. Instead of going to bed, I stood a long time at the window, looking out at the river. It was a warm, still night, and the first faint streaks of sunrise were in the sky. Presently I heard a slow footstep beneath my window, and looking down, made out by the aid of a street-lamp that Stanmer was but just coming home. I called to him to come to my rooms, and, after an interval, he made his appearance.

"I want to bid you good-bye," I said ; "I shall depart in the morning. Don't go to the trouble of saying you are sorry. Of course you are not ; I must have bullied you immensely."

He made no attempt to say he was sorry, but he said he was very glad to have made my acquaintance.

"Your conversation," he said, with his little innocent air, "has been very suggestive."

"Have you found Camerino ?" I asked, smiling.

"I have given up the search."

"Well," I said, "some day when you find that you have made a great mistake, remember I told you so."

He looked for a minute as if he were trying to anticipate that day by the exercise of his reason.

"Has it ever occurred to you that *you* may have made a great mistake ?"

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"Oh yes ; everything occurs to one sooner or later."

That's what I said to him ; but I didn't say that the question, pointed by his candid young countenance, had, for the moment, a greater force than it had ever had before.

And then he asked me whether, as things had turned out, I myself had been so especially happy.

PARIS, *December 17th.*—A note from young Stanmer, whom I saw in Florence—a remarkable little note, dated Rome, and worth transcribing.

"My Dear General—I have it at heart to tell you that I was married a week ago to the Countess Salvi-Scarabelli. You talked me into a great muddle ; but a month after that it was all very clear. Things that involve a risk are like the Christian faith ; they must be seen from the inside.—Yours ever, E.S."

"P.S.—A fig for analogies unless you can find an analogy for my happiness !"

His happiness makes him very clever. I hope it will last !—I mean his cleverness, not his happiness.

LONDON, *April, 19th, 1877.*—Last night, at Lady H—'s, I met Edmund Stanmer, who married Bianca Salvi's daughter. I heard the other day that they had come to England. A handsome young fellow, with a fresh contented face. He reminded me of Florence, which I didn't pretend to forget ; but it was rather awkward, for I remember I used to disparage that woman to him. I had a complete theory about her. But he didn't seem at all stiff ; on the contrary, he appeared to enjoy our encounter. I asked him if his wife were there. I had to do that.

"Oh yes, she's in one of the other rooms. Come and make her acquaintance ; I want you to know her."

"You forget that I do know her."

"Oh no, you don't ; you never did." And he gave a little significant laugh.

I didn't feel like facing the *ci-devant* Scarabelli at that moment ; so I said that I was leaving the house, but that I would do myself the honour of calling upon his wife. We talked for a minute of something else, and then, suddenly, breaking off and looking at me, he laid his hand on my arm. I must do him the justice to say that he looks felicitous.

"Depend upon it, you were wrong !" he said.

"My dear young friend," I answered, "imagine the alacrity with which I concede it." •

Something else again was spoken of, but in an instant he repeated his movement.

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"Depend upon it, you were wrong."

"I am sure the Countess has forgiven me," I said, "and in that case you ought to bear no grudge. As I have had the honour to say, I will call upon her immediately."

"I was not alluding to my wife," he answered. "I was thinking of your own story."

"My own story?"

"So many years ago. Was it not rather a mistake?"

I looked at him a moment; he's positively rosy.

"That's not a question to solve in a London crush."

And I turned away.

22nd.—I haven't yet called on the *ci-devant*; I am afraid of finding her at home. And that boy's words have been thrumming in my ears—"Depend upon it, you were wrong. Wasn't it rather a mistake?" Was I wrong—*was* it a mistake? Was I too cautious—too suspicious—too logical? Was it really a protector she needed—a man who might have helped her? Would it have been for his benefit to believe in her, and was her fault only that I had forsaken her? Was the poor woman very unhappy? God forgive me, how the questions come crowding in! If I marred her happiness, I certainly didn't make my own. And I might have made it—eh? That's a charming discovery for a man of my age!

LADY BARBARINA

I

It is well known that there are few sights in the world more brilliant than the main avenues of Hyde Park of a fine afternoon in June. This was quite the opinion of two persons who on a beautiful day at the beginning of that month, four years ago, had established themselves under the great trees in a couple of iron chairs—the big ones with arms, for which, if I mistake not, you pay twopence—and sat there with the slow procession of the Drive behind them while their faces were turned to the more vivid agitation of the Row. Lost in the multitude of observers they belonged, superficially at least, to that class of persons who, wherever they may be, rank rather with the spectators than with the spectacle. They were quiet, simple, elderly, of aspect somewhat neutral ; you would have liked them extremely but would scarcely have noticed them. It is to them, obscure in all that shining host, that we must nevertheless give our attention. On which the reader is begged to have confidence ; he is not asked to make vain concessions. It was indicated touchingly in the faces of our friends that they were growing old together and were fond enough of each other's company not to object—since it was a condition—even to that. The reader will have guessed that they were husband and wife ; and perhaps while he is about it will further have guessed that they were of that nationality for which Hyde Park at the height of the season is most completely illustrative. They were native aliens, so to speak, and people at once so initiated and so detached could only be Americans. This reflexion indeed you would have made only after some delay ; for it must be allowed that they bristled with none of those modern signs that carry out the tradition of the old indigenous war-paint and feathers. They had the American turn of mind, but that was very secret ; and to your eye—if your eye had cared about it—they might have been either intimately British or more remotely foreign. It was as if they studied, for convenience, to be superficially colourless ; their colour was all in their talk. They were not in the least verdant ; they were grey rather, of monotonous hue. If they were interested in the riders, the horses, the walkers, the great exhibition of English wealth and health, beauty, luxury and leisure, it was because all this referred itself

to other impressions, because they had the key to almost everything that needed an answer—because, in a word, they were able to compare. They had not arrived, they had only returned ; and recognition much more than surprise was expressed in their quiet eyes. Dexter Freer and his wife belonged in fine to that great company of Americans who are constantly “passing through” London. Enjoyers of a fortune of which, from any standpoint, the limits were plainly visible, they were unable to treat themselves to that commonest form of ease, the ease of living at home. They found it much more possible to economise at Dresden or Florence than at Buffalo or Minneapolis. The saving was greater and the strain was less. From Dresden, from Florence, moreover, they constantly made excursions that wouldn’t have been possible with an excess of territory ; and it is even to be feared they practised some eccentricities of thrift. They came to London to buy their portmanteaus, their tooth-brushes, their writing-paper ; they occasionally even recrossed the Atlantic westward to assure themselves that westward prices were still the same. They were eminently a social pair ; their interests were mainly personal. Their curiosity was so invidiously human that they were supposed to be too addicted to gossip, and they certainly kept up their acquaintance with the affairs of other people. They had friends in every country, in every town ; and it was not their fault if people told them their secrets. Dexter Freer was a tall lean man, with an interested eye and a nose that rather drooped than aspired, yet was salient withal. He brushed his hair, which was streaked with white, forward over his ears and into those locks represented in the portraits of clean-shaven gentlemen who flourished fifty years ago and wore an old-fashioned neckcloth and gaiters. His wife, a small plump person, rather polished than naturally fresh, with a white face and hair still evenly black, smiled perpetually, but had never laughed since the death of a son whom she had lost ten years after her marriage. Her husband, on the other hand, who was usually quite grave, indulged on great occasions in resounding mirth. People confided in her less than in him, but that mattered little, as she confided much in herself. Her dress, which was always black or dark grey, was so harmoniously simple that you could see she was fond of it ; it was never smart by accident or by fear. She was full of intentions of the most judicious sort and, though perpetually moving about the world, had the air of waiting for every one else to pass. She was celebrated for the promptitude with which she made her sitting-room at an inn, where she might be spending a night or two, appear a real temple of memory. With books, flowers,

photographs, draperies, rapidly distributed—she had even a way, for the most part, of not failing of a piano—the place seemed almost hereditary. The pair were just back from America, where they had spent three months, and now were able to face the world with something of the elation of people who have been justified of a stiff conviction. They had found their native land quite ruinous.

“There he is again!” said Mr. Freer, following with his eyes a young man who passed along the Row, riding slowly. “That’s a beautiful thoroughbred!”

Mrs. Freer asked idle questions only when she wanted time to think. At present she had simply to look and see who it was her husband meant. “The horse is too big,” she remarked in a moment.

“You mean the rider’s too small,” her husband returned. “He’s mounted on his millions.”

“Is it really millions?”

“Seven or eight, they tell me.”

“How disgusting!” It was so that Mrs. Freer usually spoke of the large fortunes of the day. “I wish he’d see us,” she added.

“He does see us, but he doesn’t like to look at us. He’s too conscious. He isn’t easy.”

“Too conscious of his big horse?”

“Yes and of his big fortune. He’s rather ashamed of that.”

“This is an odd place to hang one’s head in,” said Mrs. Freer.

“I’m not so sure. He’ll find people here richer than himself, and other big horses in plenty, and that will cheer him up. Perhaps too he’s looking for that girl.”

“The one we heard about? He can’t be such a fool.”

“He isn’t a fool,” said Dexter Freer. “If he’s thinking of her he has some good reason.”

“I wonder what Mary Lemon would say,” his wife pursued.

“She’d say it was all right if he should do it. She thinks he can do no wrong. He’s immensely fond of her.”

“I shan’t be sure of that,” said Mrs. Freer, “if he takes home a wife who’ll despise her.”

“Why should the girl despise her? She’s a delightful woman.”

“The girl will never know it—and if she should it would make no difference: she’ll despise everything.”

“I don’t believe it, my dear; she’ll like some things very much. Every one will be very nice to her.”

“She’ll despise them all the more. But we’re speaking as if it were all arranged. I don’t believe in it at all,” said Mrs. Freer.

“Well, something of the sort—in this case or in some other—

is sure to happen sooner or later," her husband replied, turning round a little toward the back-water, as it were, formed, near the entrance to the Park, by the confluence of the two great vistas of the Drive and the Row.

Our friends had turned their backs, as I have said, to the solemn revolution of wheels and the densely-packed mass of spectators who had chosen that aspect of the show. These spectators were now agitated by a unanimous impulse; the pushing-back of chairs, the shuffle of feet, the rustle of garments and the deepening murmur of voices sufficiently expressed it. Royalty was approaching—royalty was passing—royalty had passed. Mr. Freer turned his head and his ear a little, but failed to alter his position further, and his wife took no notice of the flurry. They had seen royalty pass, all over Europe, and they knew it passed very quickly. Sometimes it came back; sometimes it didn't; more than once they had seen it pass for the last time. They were veteran tourists and they knew as perfectly as regular attendants at complicated church-services when to get up and when to remain seated. Mr. Freer went on with his proposition. "Some young fellow's certain to do it, and one of these girls is certain to take the risk. They must take risks over here more and more."

"The girls, I've no doubt, will be glad enough; they have had very little chance as yet. But I don't want Jackson to begin."

"Do you know I rather think I do," said Dexter Freer. "It will be so very amusing."

"For us perhaps, but not for him. He'll repent of it and be wretched. He's too good for that."

"Wretched never! He has no capacity for wretchedness, and that's why he can afford to risk it."

"He'll have to make great concessions," Mrs. Freer persisted.

"He won't make one."

"I should like to see."

"You admit, then, that it will be amusing: all I contend for," her husband replied. "But, as you say, we're talking as if it were settled, whereas there's probably nothing in it after all. The best stories always turn out false. I shall be sorry in this case."

They relapsed into silence while people passed and repassed them—continuous successive mechanical, with strange facial, strange expressional, sequences and contrasts. They watched the procession, but no one heeded them, though every one was there so admittedly to see what was to be seen. It was all striking, all pictorial, and it made a great composition. The wide long area of the Row, its red-brown surface dotted with bounding figures,

stretched away into the distance and became suffused and misty in the bright thick air. The deep dark English verdure that bordered and overhung it looked rich and old, revived and refreshed though it was by the breath of June. The mild blue of the sky was spotted with great silvery clouds, and the light drizzled down in heavenly shafts over the quieter spaces of the Park, as one saw them beyond the Row. All this, however, was only a background, for the scene was before everything personal ; quite splendidly so, and full of the gloss and lustre, the contrasted tones, of a thousand polished surfaces. Certain things were salient, pervasive—the shining flanks of the perfect horses, the twinkle of bits and spurs, the smoothness of fine cloth adjusted to shoulders and limbs, the sheen of hats and boots, the freshness of complexions, the expression of smiling talking faces, the flash and flutter of rapid gallops. Faces were everywhere, and they were the great effect—above all the fair faces of women on tall horses, flushed a little under their stiff black hats, with figures stiffened, in spite of much definition of curve, by their tight-fitting habits. Their well-secured helmets, their neat compact heads, their straight necks, their firm tailor-made armour, their frequent hardy bloom, all make them look singularly like amazons about to ride a charge. The men, with their eyes before them, with hats of undulating brim, good profiles, high collars, white flowers on their chests, long legs and long feet, had an air more elaboratively decorative, as they jolted beside the ladies, always out of step. These were the younger types ; but it was not all youth, for many a saddle sustained a richer rotundity, and ruddy faces with short white whiskers or with matronly chins looked down comfortably from an equilibrium that seemed moral as well as physical. The walkers differed from the riders only in being on foot and in looking at the riders more than these looked at them ; for they would have done as well in the saddle and ridden as the others ride. The women had tight little bonnets and still tighter little knots of hair ; their round chins rested on a close swathing of lace or in some cases on throttling silver chains and circlets. They had flat backs and small waists, they walked slowly, with their elbows out, carrying vast parasols and turning their heads very little to the right or the left. They were amazons unmounted, quite ready to spring into the saddle. There was a great deal of beauty and a diffused look of happy expansion, all limited and controlled, which came from clear quiet eyes and well-cut lips, rims of stout vessels that didn't overflow and on which syllables were liquid and sentences brief. Some of the young men, as well as the women, had the happiest proportions and oval faces—

faces in which line and colour were pure and fresh and the idea of the moment far from intense.

"They're often very good-looking," said Mr. Freer at the end of ten minutes. "They're on the whole the finest whites."

"So long as they remain white they do very well ; but when they venture upon colour !" his wife replied. She sat with her eyes at the level of the skirts of the ladies who passed her, and she had been following the progress of a green velvet robe enriched with ornaments of steel and much gathered up in the hands of its wearer, who, herself apparently in her teens, was accompanied by a young lady draped in scant pink muslin, a tissue embroidered esthetically with flowers that simulated the iris.

"All the same, in a crowd, they're wonderfully well turned out," Dexter Freer went on—"lumping men and women and horses and dogs together. Look at that big fellow on the light chestnut : what could be more perfect ? By the way, it's Lord Canterville," he added in a moment and as if the fact were of some importance.

Mrs. Freer recognised its importance to the degree of raising her glass to look at Lord Canterville. "How do you know it's he ?" she asked with that implement still up.

"I heard him say something the night I went to the House of Lords. It was very few words, but I remember him. A man near me mentioned who he was."

"He's not so handsome as you," said Mrs. Freer, dropping her glass.

"Ah, you're too difficult !" her husband murmured. "What a pity that girl isn't with him," he went on. "We might see something."

It appeared in a moment, however, that the girl was with him. The nobleman designated had ridden slowly forward from the start, then just opposite our friends had pulled up to look back as if waiting for some one. At the same moment a gentleman in the Walk engaged his attention, so that he advanced to the barrier which protects the pedestrians and halted there, bending a little from his saddle and talking with his friend, who leaned against the rail. Lord Canterville was indeed perfect, as his American admirer had said. Upwards of sixty and of great stature and great presence, he was a thoroughly splendid apparition. In capital preservation he had the freshness of middle life—he would have been young indeed to the eye if his large harmonious spread hadn't spoken of the lapse of years. He was clad from head to foot in garments of a radiant grey, and his fine florid countenance was surmounted with a white hat of which the majestic curves

were a triumph of good form. Over his mighty chest disposed itself a beard of the richest growth and of a colour, in spite of a few streaks vaguely grizzled, to which the coat of his admirable horse appeared to be a perfect match. It left no opportunity in his uppermost button-hole for the customary orchid ; but this was of comparatively little consequence, since the vegetation of the beard itself was tropical. Astride his great steed, with his big fist, gloved in pearl-grey, on his swelling thigh, his face lighted up with good-humoured indifference and all his magnificent surface reflecting the mild sunshine, he was, strikingly, a founded and builded figure, such as could only represent to the public gaze some Institution, some Exhibition or some Industry, in a word some unquenchable Interest. People quite lingered to look up at him as they passed. His halt was brief, however, for he was almost immediately joined by two handsome girls, who were as well turned-out, in Dexter Freer's phrase, as himself. They had been detained a moment at the entrance to the Row and now advanced side by side, their groom close behind them. One was noticeably taller and older than the other, and it was plain at a glance that they were sisters. Between them, with their charming shoulders, their contracted waists and their skirts that hung without a wrinkle, like plates of zinc, they represented in a singularly complete form the pretty English girl in the position in which she is prettiest.

"Of course they're his daughters," said Dexter Freer as these young ladies rode away with Lord Canterville ; "and in that case one of them must be Jackson Lemon's sweetheart. Probably the bigger ; they said it was the eldest. She's evidently a fine creature."

"She'd hate it over there," Mrs. Freer returned for an answer to this cluster of inductions.

"You know I don't admit that. But granting she should, it would do her good to have to accommodate herself."

"She wouldn't accommodate herself."

"She looks so confoundedly fortunate, perched up on that saddle," he went on without heed of his wife's speech.

"Aren't they supposed to be very poor ?"

"Yes, they look it !" And his eyes followed the eminent trio while, with the groom, as eminent in his way as any of them, they started on a canter.

The air was full of sound, was low and economised ; and when, near our friends, it became articulate the words were simple and few. "It's as good as the circus, isn't it, Mrs. Freer ?" These words correspond to that description, but they pierced the

Seeing him with strangers, none the less, Sidney Feeder hung back, staring a little as he rode away.

It is open to us to know that at this moment the young lady by whose side he was riding put him the free question : "Who are those people you bowed to ?"

"Some old friends of mine—Americans," said Jackson Lemon.

"Of course they're Americans ; there's nothing anywhere but Americans now."

"Oh yes, our turn's coming round !" laughed the young man.

"But that doesn't say who they are," his companion continued. "It's so difficult to say who Americans are," she added before he had time to answer her.

"Dexter Freer and his wife—there's nothing difficult about that. Every one knows them," Jackson explained.

"I never heard of them," said the English girl.

"Ah, that's your fault and your misfortune. I assure you everybody knows them."

"And does everybody know the little man with the fat face to whom you kissed your hand ?"

"I didn't kiss my hand, but I would if I had thought of it. He's a great chum of mine—a fellow-student at Vienna."

"And what's *his* name ?"

"Doctor Feeder."

Jackson Lemon's companion had a dandling pause. "Are *all* your friends doctors ?"

"No—some of them are in other businesses."

"Are they all in some business ?"

"Most of them—save two or three like Dexter Freer."

"'Dexter' Freer ? I thought you said Doctor Freer."

The young man gave a laugh. "You heard me wrong. You've got doctors on the brain, Lady Barb."

"I'm rather glad," said Lady Barb, giving the rein to her horse, who bounded away.

"Well, yes, she's very handsome, the reason," Doctor Feeder remarked as he sat under the trees.

"Is he going to marry her ?" Mrs. Freer inquired.

"Marry her ? I hope not."

"Why do you hope not ?"

"Because I know nothing about her. I want to know something about the woman that man marries."

"I suppose you'd like him to marry in Cincinnati," Mrs. Freer not unadventurously threw out.

"Well, I'm not particular where it is ; but I want to know her first." Doctor Feeder was very sturdy.

"We were in hopes you'd know all about it," said his other entertainer.

"No, I haven't kept up with him there."

"We've heard from a dozen people that he has been always with her for the last month—and that kind of thing, in England, is supposed to mean something. Hasn't he spoken of her when you've seen him?"

"No, he has only talked about the new treatment of spinal meningitis. He's very much interested in spinal meningitis."

"I wonder if he talks about it to Lady Barb," said Mrs. Freer.

"Who is she anyway?" the young man wanted to know.

Well, his companions both let him. "Lady Barb Clement."

"And who's Lady Barb Clement?"

"The daughter of Lord Canterville."

"And who's Lord Canterville?"

"Dexter must tell you that," said Mrs. Freer.

And Dexter accordingly told him that the Marquis of Canterville had been in his day a great sporting nobleman and an ornament to English society, and had held more than once a high post in her Majesty's household. Dexter Freer knew all these things—how his lordship had married a daughter of Lord Treherne, a very serious intelligent and beautiful woman who had redeemed him from the extravagance of his youth and presented him in rapid succession with a dozen little tenants for the nurseries at Pasterns—this being, as Mr. Freer also knew, the name of the principal seat of the Cantervilles. The head of that house was a Tory, but not a particular dunce for a Tory, and very popular in society at large; good-natured, good-looking, knowing how to be rather remarkably free and yet remain a *grand seigneur*, clever enough to make an occasional telling speech and much associated with the fine old English pursuits as well as with many of the new improvements—the purification of the Turf, the opening of the museums on Sunday, the propagation of coffee-taverns, the latest ideas on sanitary reform. He disapproved of the extension of the suffrage but had positively drainage on the brain. It had been said of him at least once—and, if this historian is not mistaken, in print—that he was just the man to convey to the popular mind the impression that the British aristocracy is still a living force. He was unfortunately not very rich—for a man who had to exemplify such truths—and of his twelve children no less than seven were daughters. Lady Barb, Jackson Lemon's friend, was the second; the eldest had married Lord Beauchemin. Mr. Freer had caught quite the right pronunciation of this name, which he successfully sounded as

Bitumen. Lady Lucretia had done very well, for her husband was rich and she had brought him nothing to speak of ; but it was hardly to be expected they would all achieve such flights. Happily the younger girls were still in the schoolroom, and before they had come up, Lady Canterville, who was a woman of bold resource, would have worked off the two that were out. It was Lady Agatha's first season ; she wasn't so pretty as her sister, but was thought to be cleverer. Half-a-dozen people had spoken to him of Jackson Lemon's being a great deal at the Cantervilles. He was supposed to be enormously rich.

"Well, so he is," said Sidney Feeder, who had listened to Mr. Freer's report with attention, with eagerness even, but, for all its lucidity, with an air of imperfect apprehension.

"Yes, but not so rich as they probably think."

"Do they want his money ? Is that what they're after ?"

"You go straight to the point !" Mrs. Freer rang out.

"I haven't the least idea," said her husband. "He's a very good sort in himself."

"Yes, but he's a doctor," Mrs. Freer observed.

"What have they got against that ?" asked Sidney Feeder.

"Why, over here, you know, they only call them in to prescribe," said his other friend. "The profession isn't—a—what you'd call aristocratic."

"Well, I don't know it, and I don't know that I want to know it. How do you mean, aristocratic ? What profession is ? It would be rather a curious one. Professions are meant to do the work of professions ; and what work's done without your sleeves rolled up ? Many of the gentlemen at the congress there are quite charming."

"I like doctors very much," said Mrs. Freer ; "my father was a doctor. But they don't marry the daughters of marquises."

"I don't believe Jackson wants to marry that one," Sidney Feeder calmly argued.

"Very possibly not—people are such asses," said Dexter Freer. "But he'll have to decide. I wish you'd find out, by the way. You can if you will."

"I'll ask him—up at the congress ; I can do that. I suppose he has got to marry some one." The young man added in a moment : "And she may be a good thing."

"She's said to be charming."

"Very well then, it won't hurt him. I must say, however, I'm not sure I like all that about her family."

"What I told you ? It's all to their honour and glory," said Mr. Freer.

"Are they quite on the square? It's like those people in Thackeray."

"Oh if Thackeray could have done *this*!" And Mrs. Freer yearned over the lost hand.

"You mean all this scene?" asked the young man.

"No; the marriage of a British noblewoman and an American doctor. It would have been a subject for a master of satire."

"You see you do want it, my dear," said her husband quietly.

"I want it as a story, but I don't want it for Doctor Lemon."

"Does he call himself 'Doctor' still?" Mr. Freer asked of young Feeder.

"I suppose he does—I call him so. Of course he doesn't practise. But once a doctor always a doctor."

"That's doctrine for Lady Barb!"

Sidney Feeder wondered. "Hasn't *she* got a title too? What would she expect him to be? President of the United States? He's a man of real ability—he might have stood at the head of his profession. When I think of that I want to swear. What did his father want to go and make all that money for?"

"It must certainly be odd to them to see a 'medical man' with six or eight millions," Mr. Freer conceded.

"They use much the same term as the Choctaws," said his wife.

"Why, some of their own physicians make immense fortunes," Sidney Feeder remarked.

"Couldn't he," she went on, "be made a baronet by the Queen?"

"Yes, then he'd be aristocratic," said the young man. "But I don't see why he should want to marry over here; it seems to me to be going out of his way. However, if he's happy I don't care. I like him very much; he has 'A 1' ability. If it hadn't been for his father he'd have made a splendid doctor. But, as I say, he takes a great interest in medical science and I guess he means to promote it all he can—with his big fortune. He'll be sure to keep up his interest in research. He thinks we *do* know something and is bound we shall know more. I hope she won't lower him, the young marchioness—is that her rank? And I hope they're really good people. He ought to be very useful. I should want to know a good deal about the foreign family *I* was going to marry into."

"He looked to me, riding there, as if he knew a good deal about the Clements," Dexter Freer said, getting to his feet as his wife suggested they ought to be going; "and he looked to me pleased with the knowledge. There they come—down the other side. Will you walk away with us or will you stay?"

"Stop him and ask him, and then come and tell us—in Jermyn Street." This was Mrs. Freer's parting injunction to Sidney Feeder.

"He ought to come himself—tell him that," her husband added.

"Well, I guess I'll stay," said the young man as his companions merged themselves in the crowd that now was tending toward the gates. He went and stood by the barrier and saw Doctor Lemon and his friends pull up at the entrance to the Row, where they apparently prepared to separate. The separation took some time and Jackson's colleague became interested. Lord Canterville and his younger daughter lingered to talk with two gentlemen, also mounted, who looked a good deal at the legs of Lady Agatha's horse. Doctor Lemon and Lady Barb were face to face, very near each other, and she, leaning forward a little, stroked the overlapping neck of his glossy bay. At a distance he appeared to be talking and she to be listening without response. "Oh yes, he's making love to her," thought Sidney Feeder. Suddenly her father and sister turned away to leave the Park, and she joined them and disappeared while Jackson came up on the left again as for a final gallop. He hadn't gone far before he perceived his comrade, who awaited him at the rail; and he repeated the gesture Lady Barb had described as a kiss of the hand, though it had not to his friend's eyes that full grace. When he came within hail he pulled up.

"If I had known you were coming here I'd have given you a mount," he immediately and bountifully cried. There was not in his person that irradiation of wealth and distinction which made Lord Canterville glow like a picture; but as he sat there with his neat little legs stuck out he looked very bright and sharp and happy, wearing in his degree the aspect of one of Fortune's favourites. He had a thin keen delicate face, a nose very carefully finished, a quick eye, a trifle hard in expression, and a fine dark moustache, a good deal cultivated. He was not striking, but he had his intensity, and it was easy to see that he had his purposes.

"How many horses have you got—about forty?" his com-patriot inquired in response to his greeting.

"About five hundred," said Jackson Lemon.

"Did you mount your friends—the three you were riding with?"

"Mount them? They've got the best horses in England."

"Did they sell you this one?" Sidney Feeder continued in the same humorous strain.

"What do you think of him?" said his friend without heed of this question.

"Well, he's an awful old screw. I wonder he can carry you."

"Where did you get your hat?" Jackson asked both as a retort and as a relevant criticism.

"I got it in New York. What's the matter with it?"

"It's very beautiful. I wish I had brought over one like it."

"The head's the thing—not the hat. I don't mean yours—I mean mine," Sidney Feeder laughed. "There's something very deep in your question. I must think it over."

"Don't—don't," said Jackson Lemon; "you'll never get to the bottom of it. Are you having a good time?"

"A glorious time. Have you been up to-day?"

"Up among the doctors? No—I've had a lot of things to do," Jackson was obliged to plead.

"Well"—and his friend richly recovered it—"we had a very interesting discussion. I made a few remarks."

"You ought to have told me. What were they about?"

"About the intermarriage of races from the point of view—" And Sidney Feeder paused a moment, occupied with the attempt to scratch the nose of the beautiful horse.

"From the point of view of progeny, I suppose?"

"Not at all. From the point of view of the old friends."

"Damn the old friends!" Doctor Lemon exclaimed with jocular crudity.

"Is it true that you're going to marry a young marchioness?"

The face of the speaker in the saddle became just a trifle rigid, and his firm eyes penetrated the other. "Who has played that on you?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Freer, whom I met just now."

"Mr. and Mrs. Freer be hanged too. And who told *them*?"

"Ever so many fashionable people. I don't know who."

"Gad, how things are tattled!" cried Jackson Lemon with asperity.

"I can see it's true by the way you say that," his friend ingenuously stated.

"Do Freer and his wife believe it?" Jackson went on impatiently.

"They want you to go and see them. You can judge for yourself."

"I'll go and see them and tell them to mind their business."

"In Jermyn Street; but I forget the number. I'm sorry the marchioness isn't one of ours," Doctor Feeder continued.

"If I should marry her she *would* be quick enough. But I don't see what difference it can make to you," said Jackson.

"Why, she'll look down on the profession, and I don't like that from your wife." "

"That will touch me more than you."

"Then it is true?" Doctor Feeder cried with a finer appeal.

"She won't look down. I'll answer for that."

"You won't care. You're out of it all now."

"No, I'm not. I mean to do no end of work."

"I'll believe that when I see it," said Sidney Feeder, who was by no means perfectly incredulous, but who thought it salutary to take that tone. "I'm not sure you've any right to work—you oughtn't to have everything; you ought to leave the field to us, not take the bread out of our mouths and get the *kudos*. You must pay the penalty of being bloated. You'd have been celebrated if you had continued to practise—more celebrated than any one. But you won't be now—you can't be any way you fix it. Some one else is going to be in your place."

Jackson Lemon listened to this, but without meeting the eyes of the prophet; not, however, as if he were avoiding them, but as if the long stretch of the Ride, now less and less obstructed, irresistibly drew him off again and made his companion's talk retarding. Nevertheless he answered deliberately and kindly enough. "I hope it will be with you, old boy." And he bowed to a lady who rode past.

"Very likely it will. I hope I make you feel mean. That's what I'm trying to do."

"Oh awfully!" Jackson cried. "All the more that I'm not in the least engaged."

"Well, that's good. Won't you come up to-morrow?" Doctor Feeder went on.

"I'll try, my dear fellow. I can't be sure. Bye-bye!"

"Oh you're lost anyway!" sighed Sidney Feeder as the other started away.

2

It was Lady Marmaduke, wife of Sir Henry of that clan, who had introduced the amusing young American to Lady Beauchemin; after which Lady Beauchemin had made him acquainted with her mother and sisters. Lady Marmaduke too was of outland strain, remaining for her conjugal baronet the most ponderable consequence of a tour in the United States. At present, by the end of ten years, she knew her London as she had never known her New York, so that it had been easy for her to be, as she called herself, Jackson's social godmother. She had views with regard to his career, and these views fitted into a scheme of high policy which, if our space permitted, I should be glad to lay before the reader in

its magnitude. She wished to add an arch or two to the bridge on which she had effected her transit from America ; and it was her belief that Doctor Lemon might furnish the materials. This bridge, as yet a somewhat sketchy and rickety structure, she saw—in the future—boldly stretch from one solid pier to another. It could but serve both ways, for reciprocity was the keynote of Lady Marmaduke's plan. It was her belief that an ultimate fusion was inevitable and that those who were the first to understand the situation would enjoy the biggest returns from it. The first time the young man had dined with her he met Lady Beauchemin, who was her intimate friend. Lady Beauchemin was remarkably gracious, asking him to come and see her as if she really meant it. He in fact presented himself and in her drawing-room met her mother, who happened to be calling at the same moment. Lady Canterville, not less friendly than her daughter, invited him down to Pasterns for Eastertide, and before a month had passed it struck him that, though he was not what he would have called intimate at any house in London, the door of the house of Clement opened to him pretty often. This seemed no small good fortune, for it always opened upon a charming picture. The inmates were a blooming and beautiful race, and their interior had an aspect of the ripest comfort. It was not the splendour of New York—as New York had lately begun to appear to the young man—but an appearance and a set of conditions, of factors as he used to say, not to be set in motion in that city by any power of purchase. He himself had a great deal of money and money was good even when it was new ; but old money was somehow *more* to the shilling and the pound. Even after he learned that Lord Canterville's fortune was less present than past it was still the positive golden glow that struck him. It was Lady Beauchemin who had told him her father wasn't rich ; having told him furthermore many surprising things—things both surprising in themselves and surprising on her lips. This was to come home to him afresh that evening—the day he met Sidney Feeder in the Park. He dined out in the company of Lady Beauchemin, and afterwards, as she was alone—her husband had gone down to listen to a debate—she offered to “take him on.” She was going to several places, at some of which he must be due. They compared notes, and it was settled they should proceed together to the Trumpington's, whither, it appeared at eleven o'clock, all the world was proceeding, with the approach to the house choked for half a mile with carriages. It was a close muggy night ; Lady Beauchemin's chariot, in its place in the rank, stood still for long periods. In his corner beside her, through the open window, Jackson Lemon,

rather hot, rather oppressed, looked out on the moist greasy pavement, over which was flung, a considerable distance up and down, the flare of a public-house. Lady Beauchemin, however, was not impatient, for she had a purpose in her mind, and now she could say what she wished.

"Do you really love her?" That was the first thing she said.

"Well, I guess so," Jackson Lemon answered as if he didn't recognise the obligation to be serious.

She looked at him a moment in silence; he felt her gaze and, turning his eyes, saw her face, partly shadowed, with the aid of a street-lamp. She was not so pretty as Lady Barb; her features had a certain sharpness; her hair, very light in colour and wonderfully frizzled, almost covered her eyes, the expression of which, however, together with that of her pointed nose and the glitter of several diamonds, emerged from the gloom. What she next said seemed somehow to fall in with that. "You don't seem to know. I never saw a man in so vague a state."

"You push me a little too much; I must have time to think of it," the young man returned. "You know in my country they allow us plenty of time." He had several little oddities of expression, of which he was perfectly conscious and which he found convenient, for they guarded him in a society condemning a lonely New Yorker who proceeded by native inspiration to much exposure; they ensured him the profit corresponding with sundry sacrifices. He had no great assortment of vernacular drolleries, conscious or unconscious, to draw upon; but the occasional use of one, discreetly chosen, made him appear simpler than he really was, and reasons determined his desiring this result. He was not simple; he was subtle, circumspect, shrewd—perfectly aware that he might make mistakes. There was a danger of his making one now—a mistake that might gravely count. He was resolved only to succeed. It is true that for a great success he would take a certain risk; but the risk was to be considered, and he gained time while he multiplied his guesses and talked about his country.

"You may take ten years if you like," said Lady Beauchemin. "I'm in no hurry whatever to make you my brother-in-law. Only you must remember that you spoke to me first."

"What did I say?"

"You spoke to me of Barb as the finest girl you had seen in England."

"Oh I'm willing to stand by that." And he had another try, which would have been transparent to a compatriot. "I guess I like her type."

"I should think you might!"

LADY BARBARINA

"I like her all round—with all her peculiarities."

"What do you mean by her peculiarities?"

"Well, she has some peculiar ideas," said Jackson Lemon in a tone of the sweetest reasonableness, "and she has a peculiar way of speaking."

"Ah, you can't expect us to speak so well as you!" cried Lady Beauchemin.

"I don't see why not." He was perfectly candid. "You do some things much better."

"We've our own ways at any rate, and we think them the best in the world—as they mostly are!" laughed Lady Beauchemin. "One of them's not to let a gentleman devote himself to a girl for so long a time without some sense of responsibility. If you don't wish to marry my sister you ought to go away."

"I ought never to have come," said Jackson Lemon.

"I can scarcely agree to that," her ladyship good-naturedly replied, "as in that case I should have lost the pleasure of knowing you."

"It would have spared you this duty, which you dislike very much."

"Asking you about your intentions? Oh I don't dislike it at all!" she cried. "It amuses me extremely."

"Should you like your sister to marry me?" asked Jackson with great simplicity.

If he expected to take her by surprise he was disappointed: she was perfectly prepared to commit herself. "I should like it particularly. I think English and American society ought to be but one. I mean the best of each. A great whole."

"Will you allow me to ask whether Lady Marmaduke suggested that to you?" he at once inquired.

"We've often talked of it."

"Oh yes, that's her aim."

"Well, it's my aim too. I think there's a lot to be done."

"And you'd like me to do it?"

"To begin it, precisely. Don't you think we ought to see more of each other? I mean," she took the precaution to explain, "just the best in each country."

Jackson Lemon appeared to weigh it. "I'm afraid I haven't any general ideas. If I should marry an English girl it wouldn't be for the good of the species."

"Well, we want to be mixed a little. That I'm sure of," Lady Beauchemin said.

"You certainly got that from Lady Marmaduke," he commented.

"It's too tiresome, your not consenting to be serious ! But my father will make you so," she went on with her pleasant assurance. "I may as well let you know that he intends in a day or two to ask you your intentions. That's all I wished to say to you. I think you ought to be prepared."

"I'm much obliged to you. Lord Canterville will do quite right," the young man allowed.

There was to his companion something really unfathomable in this little American doctor whom she had taken up on grounds of large policy and who, though he was assumed to have sunk the medical character, was neither handsome nor distinguished, but only immensely rich and quite original—since he wasn't strictly insignificant. It was unfathomable, to begin with that a medical man should be so rich, or that so rich a man should be medical ; it was even, to an eye always gratified by suitability and, for that matter, almost everywhere recognising it, rather irritating. Jackson Lemon himself could have explained the anomaly better than any one else, but this was an explanation one could scarcely ask for. There were other things : his cool acceptance of certain situations ; his general indisposition to make comprehension easy, let alone to guess it, with all his guessing, so much hindered ; his way of taking refuge in jokes which at times had not even the merit of being American ; his way too of appearing to be a suitor without being an aspirant. Lady Beauchemin, however, was, like her puzzling friend himself, prepared to run a certain risk. His reserves made him slippery, but that was only when one pressed. She flattered herself she could handle people lightly. "My father will be sure to act with perfect tact," she said ; "though of course if you shouldn't care to be questioned you can go out of town." She had the air of really wishing to act with the most natural delicacy.

"I don't want to go out of town ; I'm enjoying it far too much here," Jackson cried. "And wouldn't your father have a right to ask me what I should mean by that ?"

Lady Beauchemin thought—she really wondered. But in a moment she exclaimed : "He's incapable of saying anything vulgar !"

She hadn't definitely answered his inquiry, and he was conscious of this ; but he was quite ready to say to her a little later, as he guided her steps from the brougham to the strip of carpet which, beneath a rickety border of striped cloth and between a double row of waiting footmen, policemen and dingy amateurs of both sexes, stretched from the curbstoone to the portal of the Trumpingtons : "Of course I shan't wait for Lord Canterville to speak to me."

LADY BARBARINA

He had been expecting some such announcement as this from Lady Beauchemin and really judged her father would do no more than his duty. He felt he should be prepared with an answer to the high challenge so prefigured, and he wondered at himself for still not having come to the point. Sidney Feeder's question in the Park had made him feel rather pointless ; it was the first direct allusion as yet made to his possible marriage by any one but Lady Beauchemin. None of his own people were in London ; he was perfectly independent, and even if his mother had been within reach he couldn't quite have consulted her on the subject. He loved her dearly, better than any one ; but she wasn't a woman to consult, for she approved of whatever he did : the fact of his doing it settled the case for it. He had been careful not to be too serious when he talked with Lady Barb's relative ; but he was very serious indeed as he thought over the matter within himself, which he did even among the diversions of the next half-hour, while he squeezed, obliquely and with tight arrests, through the crush in the Trumpington's drawing-room. At the end of the half-hour he came away, and at the door he found Lady Beauchemin, from whom he had separated on entering the house and who, this time with a companion of her own sex, was awaiting her carriage and still "going on." He gave her his arm to the street, and as she entered the vehicle she repeated that she hoped he'd just go out of town.

"Who then would tell me what to do ? " he returned, looking at her through the window.

She might tell him what to do, but he felt free all the same ; and he was determined this should continue. To prove it to himself he jumped into a hansom and drove back to Brook Street and to his hotel instead of proceeding to a bright-windowed house in Portland Place where he knew he should after midnight find Lady Canterville and her daughters. He recalled a reference to that chance during his ride with Lady Barb, who would probably expect him ; but it made him taste his liberty not to go, and he liked to taste his liberty. He was aware that to taste it in perfection he ought to "turn in" ; but he didn't turn in, he didn't even take off his hat. He walked up and down his sitting-room with his head surmounted by this ornament, a good deal tipped back, and with his hands in his pockets. There were various cards stuck into the frame of the mirror over his chimney-piece, and every time he passed the place he seemed to see what was written on one of them—the name of the mistress of the house in Portland Place, his own name and in the lower left-hand corner "A small Dance." Of course, now, he must make up his mind ;

he'd make it up by the next day : that was what he said to himself as he walked up and down ; and according to his decision he'd speak to Lord Canterville or would take the night-express to Paris. It was better meanwhile he shouldn't see Lady Barb. It was vivid to him, as he occasionally paused with fevered eyes on the card in the chimney-glass, that he had come pretty far ; and he had come so far because he was under the spell—yes, he was under the spell, or whatever it was, of Lady Barb. There was no doubt whatever of this ; he had a faculty for diagnosis and he knew perfectly what was the matter with him. He wasted no time in musing on the mystery of his state ; in wondering if he mightn't have escaped such a seizure by a little vigilance at first, or if it would abate should he go away. He accepted it frankly for the sake of the pleasure it gave him—the girl was the delight of most of his senses—and confined himself to considering how it would square with his general situation to marry her. The squaring wouldn't at all necessarily follow from the fact that he was in love ; too many other things would come in between. The most important of these was the change not only of the geographical but of the social standpoint for his wife, and a certain readjustment that it would involve in his own relation to things. He wasn't inclined to readjustments, and there was no reason why he should be : his own position was in most respects so advantageous. But the girl tempted him almost irresistibly, satisfying his imagination both as a lover and as a student of the human organism ; she was so blooming, so complete, of a type so rarely encountered in that degree of perfection. Jackson Lemon was no Anglomaniac, but he took peculiar pleasure in certain physical facts of the English—their complexion, their temperament, their tissue ; and Lady Barb had affected him from the first as in flexible virginal form a wonderful compendium of these elements. There was something simple and robust in her beauty ; it had the quietness of an old Greek statue, without the vulgarity of the modern simper or of contemporary prettiness. Her head was antique, and though her conversation was quite of the present period Jackson told himself that some primitive sincerity of soul couldn't but match with the cast of her brow, of her bosom, of the back of her neck, and with the high carriage of her head, which was at once so noble and so easy. He saw her as she might be in the future, the beautiful mother of beautiful children in whom the appearance of "race" should be conspicuous. He should like his children to have the appearance of race as well as other signs of good stuff, and wasn't unaware that he must take his precautions accordingly. A great many people

in England had these indications, and it was a pleasure to him to see them, especially as no one had them so unmistakably as the second daughter of the Cantervilles. It would be a great luxury to call a creature so constituted one's own ; nothing could be more evident than that, because it made no difference that she wasn't strikingly clever. Striking cleverness wasn't one of the signs, nor a mark of the English complexion in general ; it was associated with the modern simper, which was a result of modern nerves. If Jackson had wanted a wife all fiddlestrings of course he could have found her at home ; but this tall fair girl, whose character, like her figure, appeared mainly to have been formed by riding across country, was differently put together. All the same would it suit his book, as they said in London, to marry her and transport her to New York ? He came back to this question ; came back to it with a persistency which, had she been admitted to a view of it, would have tried the patience of Lady Beauchemin. She had been irritated more than once at his appearing to attach himself so exclusively to that horn of the dilemma—as if it could possibly fail to be a good thing for a little American doctor to marry the daughter of an English peer. It would have been more becoming in her ladyship's eyes that he should take this for granted a little more and take the consent of her ladyship's—of their ladyship's—family a little less. They looked at the matter so differently ! Jackson Lemon was conscious that if he should propose for the young woman who so strongly appealed to him it would be because it suited him, and not because it suited his possible sisters-in-law. He believed himself to act in all things by his own faculty of choice and volition, a feature of his outfit in which he had the highest confidence.

It would have seemed, indeed, that just now this part of his inward machine was not working very regularly since, though he had come home to go to bed, the stroke of half-past twelve saw him jump not into his sheets but into a hansom which the whistle of the porter had summoned to the door of his hotel and in which he rattled off to Portland Place. Here he found—in a very large house—an assembly of five hundred persons and a band of music concealed in a bower of azaleas. Lady Canterville had not arrived ; he wandered through the rooms and assured himself of that. He also discovered a very good conservatory, where there were banks and pyramids of azaleas. He watched the top of the staircase, but it was a long time before he saw what he was looking for, and his impatience grew at last extreme. The reward, however, when it came, was all he could have desired. It consisted of a clear smile from Lady Barb, who stood behind her mother

LADY BARBARINA

while the latter extended vague finger-tips to the hostess. The entrance of this charming woman and her beautiful daughters—always a noticeable incident—was effected with a certain spread of commotion, and just now it was agreeable to Jackson to feel this produced impression concern him probably more than any one else in the house. Tall, dazzling, indifferent, looking about her as if she saw very little, Lady Barb was certainly a figure round which a young man's fancy might revolve. Very rare, yet very quiet and very simple, she had little manner and little movement ; but her detachment was not a vulgar art. She appeared to efface herself, to wait till, in the natural course, she should be attended to ; and in this there was evidently no exaggeration, for she was too proud not to have perfect confidence. Her sister, quite another affair, with a little surprised smile which seemed to say that in her extreme innocence she was still prepared for anything, having heard, indirectly, such extraordinary things about society, was much more impatient and more expressive, and had always projected across a threshold the pretty radiance of her eyes and teeth before her mother's name was announced. Lady Canterville was by many persons more admired and more championed than her daughters ; she had kept even more beauty than she had given them, and it was a beauty which had been called intellectual. She had extraordinary sweetness, without any definite professions ; her manner was mild almost to tenderness ; there was even in it a degree of thoughtful pity, of human comprehension. Moreover her features were perfect, and nothing could be more gently gracious than a way she had of speaking, or rather of listening, to people with her head inclined a little to one side. Jackson liked her without trepidation, and she had certainly been " awfully nice " to him. He approached Lady Barb as soon as he could do so without an appearance of rushing up ; he remarked to her that he hoped very much she wouldn't dance. He was a master of the art which flourishes in New York above every other, and had guided her through a dozen waltzes with a skill which, as she felt, left absolutely nothing to be desired. But dancing was not his business to-night. She smiled without scorn at the expression of his hope.

" That's what mamma has brought us here for," she said ; " she doesn't like it if we don't dance."

" How does she know whether she likes it or not ? You always have danced."

" Oh, once there was a place where I didn't," said Lady Barb.

He told her he would at any rate settle it with her mother, and persuaded her to wander with him into the conservatory, where

LADY BARBARINA

coloured lights were suspended among the plants and a vault of verdure arched above. In comparison with the other rooms this retreat was far and strange. But they were not alone ; half-a-dozen other couples appeared to have had reasons as good as theirs. The gloom, none the less, was rosy with the slopes of azalea and suffused with mitigated music, which made it possible to talk without consideration of one's neighbours. In spite of this, though it was only in looking back on the scene later that Lady Barb noted the fact, these dispersed couples were talking very softly. She didn't look at them ; she seemed to take it that virtually she was alone with the young American. She said something about the flowers, about the fragrance of the air ; for all answer to which he asked her, as he stood there before her, a question that might have startled her by its suddenness.

"How do people who marry in England ever know each other before marriage ? They have no chance."

"I'm sure I don't know," she returned. "I never was married."

"It's very different in my country. There a man may see much of a girl ; he may freely call on her, he may be constantly alone with her. I wish you allowed that over here."

Lady Barb began to examine the less ornamental side of her fan as if it had never invited her before. "It must be so very odd, America," she then concluded.

"Well, I guess in that matter we're right. Over here it's a leap in the dark."

"I'm sure I don't know," she again made answer. She had folded her fan ; she stretched out her arm mechanically and plucked a sprig of azalea.

"I guess it doesn't signify after all," Jackson however proceeded. "Don't you know they say that love's blind at the best ?" His keen young face was bent upon hers ; his thumbs were in the pockets of his trousers ; he smiled with a slight strain, showing his fine teeth. She said nothing, only pulling her azalea to pieces. She was usually so quiet that this small movement was striking.

"This is the first time I've seen you in the least without a lot of people," he went on.

"Yes, it's very tiresome."

"I've been sick of it. I didn't want even to come here to-night."

She hadn't met his eyes, though she knew they were seeking her own. But now she looked at him straight. She had never objected to his appearance, and in this respect had no repugnance to surmount. She liked a man to be tall and handsome, and Jackson Lemon was neither ; but when she was sixteen, and as tall herself as she was to be at twenty, she had been in love—

for three weeks—with one of her cousins, a little fellow in the Hussars, who was shorter even than the American, was of inches markedly fewer than her own. This proved that distinction might be independent of stature—not that she had ever reasoned it out. Doctor Lemon's facial spareness and his bright ocular attention, which had a fine edge and a marked scale, unfolded and applied rule-fashion, affected her as original, and she thought of them as rather formidable to a good many people, which would do very well in a husband of hers. As she made this reflexion it of course never occurred to her that she herself might suffer true measurement, for she was not a sacrificial lamb. She felt sure his features expressed a mind—a mind immensely useful, like a good hack or whatever, and that he knew how to employ. She would never have supposed him a doctor ; though indeed when all was said this was very negative and didn't account for the way he imposed himself.

"Why, then, did you come?" she asked in answer to his last speech.

"Because it seems to me after all better to see you this way than not to see you at all. I want to know you better."

"I don't think I ought to stay here," she said as she looked round her.

"Don't go till I've told you I love you," the young man distinctly replied.

She made no exclamation, indulged in no start ; he couldn't see even that she changed colour. She took his request with a noble simplicity, her head erect and her eyes lowered. "I don't think you've quite a right to tell me that."

"Why not?" Jackson demanded. "I want to claim the right. I want you to give it to me."

"I can't—I don't know. You've said that yourself."

"Can't you have a little faith?" he at once asked, speaking as fast as if he were not even a little afraid to urge the pace. "That will help us to know each other better. It's disgusting, the want of opportunity ; even at Pasterns I could scarcely get a walk with you. But I've the most absolute trust of you. I *know* I love you, and I couldn't do more than that at the end of six months. I love your beauty, I love your nature, I love you from head to foot. Don't move, please don't move." He lowered his tone now, but it went straight to her ear and we must believe conveyed a certain eloquence. For himself, after he had heard himself say these words, all his being was in a glow. It was a luxury to speak to her of her beauty ; it brought him nearer to her than he had ever been. But the colour had come into her face and seemed to

remind him that her beauty wasn't all. "Everything about you is true and sweet and grand," he went on ; "everything's dear to me. I'm sure you're good. I don't know what you think of me ; I asked Lady Beauchemin to tell me, and she told me to judge for myself. Well, then, I judge you like me. Haven't I a right to assume that till the contrary's proved ? May I speak to your father ? That's what I want to know. I've been waiting, but now what should I wait for longer ? I want to be able to tell him you've given me hope. I suppose I ought to speak to him first. I meant to, to-morrow, but meanwhile, to-night, I thought I'd just put this in. In my country it wouldn't matter particularly. You must see all that over there for yourself. If you should tell me not to speak to your father I wouldn't—I'd wait. But I like better to ask your leave to speak to him than ask his to speak to you."

His voice had sunk almost to a whisper, but, though it trembled, the fact of his pleading gave it intensity. He had the same attitude, his thumbs in his trousers, his neat attentive young head, his smile, which was a matter of course ; no one would have imagined what he was saying. She had listened without moving and at the end she raised her eyes. They rested on his own a moment, and he remembered for a long time the look, the clear effluence of splendid maidenhood, as deep as a surrender, that passed her lids.

Disconcertingly, however, there was no surrender in what she answered. "You may say anything you please to my father, but I don't wish to hear any more. You've said too much, considering how little idea you've given me before."

"I was watching you," said Jackson Lemon.

She held her head higher still looking straight at him. Then quite seriously, "I don't like to be watched," she returned.

"You shouldn't be so beautiful then. Won't you give me a word of hope ?"

"I've never supposed I should marry a foreigner," said Lady Barb.

"Do you call me a foreigner ?"

"I think your ideas are very different and your country different. You've told me so yourself."

"I should like to show it to you. I would make you like it."

"I'm not sure what you'd make me do," she went on very honestly.

"Nothing you don't want."

"I'm sure you'd try," she smiled as for more accommodation.

"Well," said Jackson Lemon, "I'm after all trying now."

To this she returned that she must go to her mother, and he was obliged to lead her out of the place. Lady Canterville was not immediately found, so that he had time to keep it up a little as they went. "Now that I've spoken I'm very happy."

"Perhaps you're happy too soon."

"Ah, don't say that, Lady Barb," he tenderly groaned.

"Of course I must think of it."

"Of course you must!" Jackson abundantly concurred. "I'll speak to your father to-morrow."

"I can't fancy what he'll say."

"How can he dislike me? But I guess he doesn't!" the young man cried in a tone which Lady Beauchemin, had she heard him, would have felt connection with this general retreat upon the quaint. What Lady Beauchemin's sister thought of it is not recorded; but there is perhaps a clue to her opinion in the answer she made him after a moment's silence: "Really, you know, you *are* a foreigner!" With this she turned her back, for she was already in her mother's hands. Jackson Lemon said a few words to Lady Canterville; they were chiefly about its being very hot. She gave him her vague sweet attention, as if he were saying something ingenious but of which she missed the point. He could see she was thinking of the ways of her daughter Agatha, whose attitude toward the contemporary young man, was wanting in the perception of differences—a madness too much without method; she was evidently not occupied with Lady Barb, who was more to be depended on. This young woman never met her suitor's eyes again; she let her own rest rather ostentatiously on other objects. At last he was going away without a glance from her. Her mother had asked him to luncheon for the morrow, and he had said he would come if she would promise him he should see his lordship. "I can't pay you another visit till I've had some talk with him."

"I don't see why not, but if I speak to him I daresay he will be at home," she returned.

"It will be worth his while!" At this he almost committed himself; and he left the house reflecting that as he had never proposed to a girl before he couldn't be expected to know how women demean themselves in this emergency. He had heard indeed that Lady Barb had had no end of offers; and though he supposed the number probably overstated, as it always is, he had to infer that her way of appearing suddenly to have dropped him was but the usual behaviour for the occasion.

3

AT her mother's the next day she was absent from luncheon, and Lady Canterville mentioned to him—he didn't ask—that she had gone to see a dear old great-aunt who was also her godmother and who lived at Roehampton. Lord Canterville was not present, but Jackson learned from his hostess that he had promised her he would come in exactly at three o'clock. Our young man lunched with her ladyship and the children, who appeared in force at this repast, all the younger girls being present, and two little boys, the juniors of the two sons who were in their teens. Doctor Lemon, who was fond of children and thought these absolutely the finest in the world—magnificent specimens of a magnificent brood, such as it would be so satisfactory in future days to see about his own knee—Doctor Lemon felt himself treated as one of the family, but was not frightened by what he read into the privilege of his admission. Lady Canterville showed no sense whatever of his having mooted the question of becoming her son-in-law, and he believed the absent object of his attentions hadn't told her of their evening's talk. This idea gave him pleasure ; he liked to think Lady Barb was judging him for herself. Perhaps indeed she was taking counsel of the old lady at Roehampton ; he saw himself the sort of lover of whom a godmother would approve. Godmothers, in his mind, were mainly associated with fairy-tales—he had had no baptismal sponsors of his own ; and that point of view would be favourable to a young man with a great deal of gold who had suddenly arrived from a foreign country—an apparition surely in a proper degree elfish. He made up his mind he should like Lady Canterville as a mother-in-law ; she would be too well-bred to meddle. Her husband came in at three o'clock, just after they had risen, and observed that it was very good in him to have waited.

"I haven't waited," Jackson replied with his watch in his hand ; "you're punctual to the minute."

I know not how Lord Canterville may have judged his young friend, but Jackson Lemon had been told more than once in his life that he would have been all right if he hadn't been so literal. After he had lighted a cigarette in his lordship's "den," a large brown apartment on the ground-floor, which partook at once of the nature of an office and of that of a harness-room—it couldn't have been called in any degree a library or even a study—he went straight to the point in these terms : "Well now, Lord Canterville, I felt I ought to let you know without more delay that I'm in love

LADY BARBARINA

with Lady Barb and that I should like to make her my wife." So he spoke, puffing his cigarette, with his conscious but unextenuating eyes fixed on his host.

No man, as I have intimated, bore better being looked at than this noble personage ; he seemed to bloom in the envious warmth of human contemplation and never appeared so faultless as when most exposed. " My dear fellow, my dear fellow," he murmured almost in disparagement, stroking his ambrosial beard from before the empty fireplace. He lifted his eyebrows, but looked perfectly good-natured.

" Are you surprised, sir ? " Jackson asked.

" Why I suppose a fellow's surprised at any one's wanting one of his children. He sometimes feels the weight of that sort of thing so much, you know. He wonders what use on earth another man can make of them." And Lord Canterville laughed pleasantly through the copious fringe of his lips.

" I only want one of them," said his guest, laughing too, but with a lighter organ.

" Polygamy would be rather good for the parents. However, Luke told me the other night she knew you to be looking the way you speak of."

" Yes, I mentioned to Lady Beauchemin that I love Lady Barb, and she seemed to think it natural."

" Oh I suppose there's no want of nature in it ! But, my dear fellow, I really don't know what to say," his lordship added.

" Of course you'll have to think of it." In saying which Jackson felt himself make the most liberal concession to the point of view of his interlocutor ; being perfectly aware that in his own country it wasn't left much to the parents to think of.

" I shall have to talk it over with my wife."

" Well, Lady Canterville has been very kind to me ; I hope she'll continue."

Lord Canterville passed a large fair hand, as for inspiration, over his beard. " My dear fellow, we're excellent friends. No one could appreciate you more than Lady Canterville. Of course we can only consider such a question on the—a—the highest grounds. You'd never want to marry without knowing—as it were—exactly what you're doing. I, on my side, naturally, you know, am bound to do the best I can for my own poor child. At the same time, of course, we don't want to spend our time in—a—walking round the horse. We want to get *at* the truth about him." It was settled between them after a little that the truth about Lemon's business was that he knew to a certainty the state of his affections and was in a position to pretend to the hand of a young

lady who, Lord Canterville might say without undue swagger, had a right to expect to do as well as any girl about the place.

"I should think she had," Doctor Lemon said. "She's a very rare type."

His entertainer had a pleasant blank look. "She's a clever well-grown girl and she takes her fences like a grasshopper. Does she know all this, by the way?"

"Oh yes, I told her last night."

Again Lord Canterville had the air, unusual with him, of sounding, at some expense of precious moments, the expression of face of a visitor so unacquainted with shyness. "I'm not sure you ought to have done that, you know."

"I couldn't have spoken to you first—I couldn't," said Jackson Lemon. "I meant to; but it stuck in my crop."

"They don't in your country, I guess," his lordship amicably laughed.

"Well, not as a general thing. However, I find it very pleasant to have the whole thing out with you now." And in truth it was very pleasant. Nothing could be easier, friendlier, more informal, than Lord Canterville's manner, which implied all sorts of equality, especially that of age and fortune, and made our young man feel at the end of three minutes almost as if he too were a beautifully-preserved and somewhat straitened nobleman of sixty, with the views of a man of the world about his own marriage. Jackson perceived that Lord Canterville waived the point of his having spoken first to the girl herself, and saw in this indulgence a just concession to the ardour of young affection. For his lordship seemed perfectly to appreciate the sentimental side—at least so far as it was embodied in his visitor—when he said without deprecation: "Did she give you any encouragement?"

"Well, she didn't box my ears. She told me she'd think of it, but that I must speak to you. Naturally, however, I shouldn't have said what I did if I hadn't made up my mind during the last fortnight that I'm not disagreeable to her."

"Ah, my dear young man, women are odd fish!" this parent exclaimed rather unexpectedly. "But of course you know all that," he added in an instant; "you take the general risk."

"I'm perfectly willing to take the general risk. The particular risk strikes me as small."

"Well, upon my honour I don't really know my girls. You see a man's time in England is tremendously taken up; but I daresay it's the same in your country. Their mother knows them—I think I had better send for their mother. If you don't mind," Lord Canterville wound up, "I'll just suggest that she join us here."

"I'm rather afraid of you both together, but if it will settle it any quicker—!" Jackson said. His companion rang the bell and, when a servant appeared, despatched him with a message to her ladyship. While they were waiting the young man remembered how easily he could give a more definite account of his pecuniary basis. He had simply stated before that he was abundantly able to marry; he shrank from putting himself forward as a monster of money. With his excellent taste he wished to appeal to Lord Canterville primarily as a gentleman. But now that he had to make a double impression he bethought himself of his millions, for millions were always impressive. "It strikes me as only fair to let you know that my fortune's really considerable."

"Yes, I daresay you're beastly rich," said Lord Canterville with a natural and visible faith.

"Well, I represent, all told, some seven millions."

"Seven millions?"

"I count in dollars. Upwards of a million and a half sterling."

Lord Canterville looked at him from head to foot, exhaling with great promptitude an air of cheerful resignation to a form of grossness threatening to become common. Then he said with a touch of that inconsequence of which he had already given a glimpse: "What the deuce in that case possessed you to turn doctor?"

Jackson Lemon coloured a little and demurred, but bethought himself of his best of reasons. "Why, my having simply the talent for it."

"Of course I don't for a moment doubt your ability. But don't you," his lordship candidly asked, "find it rather a bore?"

"I don't practise much. I'm rather ashamed to say that."

"Ah well, of course, in your country it's different. I daresay you've got a door-plate, eh?"

"Oh yes, and a tin sign tied to the balcony!" Jackson laughed.

Here the joke was beyond his friend, who but went on: "What on earth did your father say to it?"

"To my going into medicine? He said he'd be hanged if he'd take any of my doses. He didn't think I should succeed; he wanted me to go into the house."

"Into the House—a—?" Lord Canterville just wondered. "That would be into your Congress?"

"Ah no, not so bad as that. Into the store," Jackson returned with that refinement of the ingenuous which he reserved for extreme cases.

His host stared, not venturing even for the moment to hazard

LADY BARBARINA

an interpretation ; and before a solution had presented itself Lady Canterville was on the scene.

"My dear, I thought we had better see you. Do you know he wants to marry our second girl?" It was in these simple and lucid terms that her husband acquainted her with the question.

She expressed neither surprise nor elation ; she simply stood there smiling, her head a little inclined to the side and her beautiful benevolence well to the front. Her charming eyes rested on Doctor Lemon's ; and, though they showed a shade of anxiety for a matter of such importance, his own discovered in them none of the coldness of calculation. "Are you talking about dear Barb?" she asked in a moment and as if her thoughts had been far away.

Of course they were talking about dear Barb, and Jackson repeated to her what he had said to her noble spouse. He had thought it all over and his mind was quite made up. Moreover, he had spoken to the young woman.

"Did she tell you that, my dear?" his lordship asked while he lighted another cigar.

She gave no heed to this inquiry, which had been vague and accidental on the speaker's part ; she simply remarked to their visitor that the thing was very serious and that they had better sit down a moment. In an instant he was near her on the sofa on which she had placed herself and whence she still smiled up at her husband with her air of luxurious patience.

"Barb has told me nothing," she dropped, however, after a little.

"That proves how much she cares for me!" Jackson declared with instant lucidity.

Lady Canterville looked as if she thought this really too ingenious, almost as professional as if their talk were a consultation ; but her husband went, all gaily, straighter to the point. "Ah well, if she cares for you I don't object."

This was a little ambiguous ; but before the young man had time to look into it his hostess put a bland question. "Should you expect her to live in America?"

"Oh yes. That's my home, you know."

"Shouldn't you be living sometimes in England?"

"Oh yes—we'll come over and see you." He was in love, he wanted to marry, he wanted to be genial and to commend himself to the family ; yet it was in his nature not to accept conditions save in so far as they met his taste, not to tie himself or, as they said in New York, give himself away. He preferred in any transaction his own terms to those of any one else, so that the moment Lady

Canterville gave signs of wishing to extract a promise he was on his guard.

"She'll find it very difficult ; perhaps she won't like it," her ladyship suggested.

"If she likes me she'll like my country," Jackson Lemon returned with decision.

"He tells me he has a plate on his door," Lord Canterville put in for the right pleasant tone.

"We must talk to her of course ; we must understand how she feels"—and his wife looked, though still gracious, more nobly responsible.

"Please don't discourage her, Lady Canterville," Jackson firmly said, "and give me a chance to talk to her a little more myself. You haven't given me much chance, you know."

"We don't offer our daughters to people however amiable, Mr. Lemon." Her charming grand manner rather quickened.

"She isn't like some women in London, you know," Lord Canterville helpfully explained ; "you see we rather stave off the evil day : we like to be together." And Jackson certainly, if the idea had been presented to him, would have said that No, decidedly, Lady Barb hadn't been thrown at him.

"Of course not," he declared in answer to her mother's remark. "But you know you mustn't decline overtures too much either ; you mustn't make a poor fellow wait too long. I admire her, I love her, more than I can say ; I give you my word of honour for that."

"He seems to think that settles it," said Lord Canterville, shining richly down at the young American from his place before the cold chimney-piece.

"Certainly that's what we desire, Philip," her ladyship returned with an equal grace.

"Lady Barb believes it ; I'm sure she does !" Jackson exclaimed with spirit. "Why should I pretend to be in love with her if I'm not ?"

Lady Canterville received this appeal in silence, and her husband, with just the least air in the world of repressed impatience, began to walk up and down the room. He was a man of many engagements, and he had been closeted for more than a quarter of an hour with the young American doctor. "Do you imagine you should come often to England ?" Lady Canterville asked as if to think of everything.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that ; of course we shall do whatever seems best." He was prepared to suppose they should cross the Atlantic every summer—that prospect was by no means

displeasing to him ; but he wasn't prepared to tie himself, as he would have said, up to it, nor up to anything in particular. It was in his mind not as an overt pretension but as a tacit implication that he should treat with the parents of his presumed bride on the footing of perfect equality ; and there would somehow be nothing equal if he should begin to enter into engagements that didn't belong to the essence of the matter. They were to give their daughter and he was to take her : in this arrangement there would be as much on one side as on the other. But beyond it he had nothing to ask of them ; there was nothing he was calling on them to promise, and his own pledges therefore would have no equivalent. Whenever his wife should wish it she should come over and see her people. Her home was to be in New York ; but he was tacitly conscious that on the question of absences he should be very liberal, and there was meanwhile something in the very grain of his character that forbade he should be eagerly yielding about times and dates.

Lady Canterville looked at her spouse, but he was now not attentive ; he was taking a peep at his watch. In a moment, however, he threw out a remark to the effect that he thought it a capital thing the two countries should become more united, and there was nothing that would bring it about better than a few of the best people on both sides pairing-off together. The English indeed had begun it ; a lot of fellows had brought over a lot of pretty girls, and it was quite fair play that the Americans should take their pick. They were all one race, after all ; and why shouldn't they make one society—the best of both sides, of course ? Jackson Lemon smiled as he recognised Lady Marmaduke's great doctrine, and he was pleased to think Lady Beauchemin had some influence with her father ; for he was sure the great old boy, as he mentally designated his host, had got all this from her, though he expressed himself less happily than the cleverest of his daughters.

Our hero had no objection to make to it, especially if there were aught in it that would really help his case. But it was not in the least on these high grounds he had sought the hand of Lady Barb. He wanted her not in order that her people and his—the best on both sides !—should make one society ; he wanted her simply because he wanted her. Lady Canterville smiled, but she seemed to have another thought.

"I quite appreciate what my husband says, but I don't see why poor Barb should be the one to begin."

"I daresay she'll like it," said his lordship as if he were attempting a short cut. "They say you spoil your women awfully."

"She's not one of their women yet," Lady Canterville remarked in the sweetest tone in the world ; and then she added without Jackson Lemon's knowing exactly what she meant : "It seems so strange."

He was slightly irritated, and these vague words perhaps added to the feeling. There had been no positive opposition to his suit, and both his entertainers were most kind ; but he felt them hold back a little, and though he hadn't expected them to throw themselves on his neck he was rather disappointed—his pride was touched. Why should they hesitate ? He knew himself such a good *parti*. It was not so much his noble host—it was Lady Canterville. As he saw her lord and master look covertly and a second time at his watch he could have believed him glad to settle the matter on the spot. Lady Canterville seemed to wish their aspirant to come forward more, to give certain assurances and pledges. He felt he was ready to say or do anything that was a matter of proper form, but he couldn't take the tone of trying to purchase her ladyship's assent, penetrated as he was with the conviction that such a man as he could be trusted to care for his wife rather more than an impecunious British peer and *his* wife could be supposed—with the lights he had acquired on English society—to care even for the handsomest of a dozen children. It was a mistake on the old lady's part not to recognise that. He humoured this to the extent of saying just a little dryly : "My wife shall certainly have everything she wants."

"He tells me he's disgustingly rich," Lord Canterville added, pausing before their companion with his hands in his pockets.

"I'm glad to hear it ; but it isn't so much that," she made answer, sinking back a little on her sofa. If it wasn't that she didn't say what it was, though she had looked for a moment as if she were going to. She only raised her eyes to her husband's face, she asked for inspiration. I know not whether she found it, but in a moment she said to Jackson Lemon, seeming to imply that it was quite another point : "Do you expect to continue your profession ?"

He had no such intention, so far as his profession meant getting up at three o'clock in the morning to assuage the ills of humanity ; but here, as before, the touch of such a question instantly stiffened him. "Oh, my profession ! I rather wince at that grand old name. I've neglected my work so scandalously that I scarce know on what terms with it I shall be—though hoping for the best when once I'm right there again."

Lady Canterville received these remarks in silence, fixing her eyes once more upon her husband's. But his countenance really

rather failed her ; still with his hands in his pockets, save when he needed to remove his cigar from his lips, he went and looked out of the window. "Of course we know you don't practise, and when you're a married man you'll have less time even than now. But I should really like to know if they call you Doctor over there."

"Oh yes, universally. We're almost as fond of titles as your people."

"I don't call that a title," her ladyship smiled.

"It's not as good as duke or marquis, I admit ; but we have to take what we've got."

"Oh bother, what does it signify ?" his lordship demanded from his place at the window. "I used to have a horse named Doctor, and a jolly good one too."

"Don't you call bishops Doctors ? Well, then, call me Bishop !" Jackson laughed,

Lady Canterville visibly didn't follow. "I don't care for *any* titles," she nevertheless observed. "I don't see why a gentleman shouldn't be called Mr."

It suddenly appeared to her young friend that there was something helpless, confused and even slightly comical in her state. The impression was mollifying, and he too, like Lord Canterville, had begun to long for a short cut. He relaxed a moment and, leaning toward his hostess with a smile and his hands on his little knees, he said softly : "It seems to me a question of no importance. All I desire is that you should call me your son-in-law."

She gave him her hand and he pressed it almost affectionately. Then she got up, remarking that before anything was decided she must see her child, must learn from her own lips the state of her feelings. "I don't like at all her not having spoken to me already," she added.

"Where has she gone—to Rochampton ? I daresay she has told it all to her godmother," said Lord Canterville.

"She won't have much to tell, poor girl !" Jackson freely commented. "I must really insist on seeing with more freedom the person I wish to marry."

"You shall have all the freedom you want in two or three days," said Lady Canterville. She irradiated all her charity ; she appeared to have accepted him and yet still to be making tacit assumptions. "Aren't there certain things to be talked of first ?"

"Certain things, dear lady ?"

She looked at her husband, and though he was still at his window he felt it this time in her silence and had to come away

and speak. "Oh she means settlements and that kind of thing." This was an allusion that came with a much better grace from the father.

Jackson turned from one of his companions to the other ; he coloured a little and his self-control was perhaps a trifle strained. "Settlements? We don't make them in my country. You may be sure I shall make proper provision for my wife."

"My dear fellow, over here—in our class, you know—it's the custom," said Lord Canterville with a truer ease in his face at the thought that the discussion was over.

"I've my own ideas," Jackson returned with even greater confidence.

"It seems to me it's a question for the solicitors to discuss," Lady Canterville suggested.

"They may discuss it as much as they please"—the young man showed amusement. He thought he saw his solicitors discussing it! He had indeed his own ideas. He opened the door for his hostess and the three passed out of the room together, walking into the hall in a silence that expressed a considerable awkwardness. A note had been struck which grated and scratched a little. A pair of shining footmen, at their approach, rose from a bench to a great altitude and stood there like sentinels presenting arms. Jackson stopped, looking for a moment into the interior of his hat, which he had in his hand. Then raising his keen eyes he fixed them a moment on those of Lady Canterville, addressing her instinctively rather than his other critic. "I guess you and Lord Canterville had better leave it to me!"

"We have our traditions, Mr. Lemon," said her ladyship with a firm grace. "I imagine you don't know—!" she gravely breathed.

Lord Canterville laid his hand on their visitor's shoulder. "My dear boy, those fellows will settle it in three minutes."

"Very likely they will!" said Jackson Lemon. Then he asked of Lady Canterville when he might see Lady Barb.

She turned it spaciously over. "I'll write you a note."

One of the tall footmen at the end of the impressive vista had opened wide the portals, as if even he were aware of the dignity to which the small strange gentleman had virtually been raised. But Jackson lingered ; he was visibly unsatisfied, though apparently so little conscious he was unsatisfying. "I don't think you understand me."

"Your ideas are certainly different," said Lady Canterville.

His Lordship, however, made comparatively light of it. "If the girl understands you that's enough!"

"Mayn't *she* write to me?" Jackson asked of her mother. "I certainly must write to her, you know, if you won't let me see her."

"Oh yes, you may write to her, Mr. Lemon."

There was a point, for a moment, in the look he returned on this, while he said to himself that if necessary he would transmit his appeal through the old lady at Roehampton. "All right—good-bye. You know what I want at any rate." Then as he was going he turned and added: "You needn't be afraid I won't always bring her over in the hot weather!"

"In the hot weather?" Lady Canterville murmured with vague visions of the torrid zone. Jackson however quitted the house with the sense he had made great concessions.

His host and hostess passed into a small morning-room and—Lord Canterville having taken up his hat and stick to go out again—stood for a moment, face to face. Then his lordship spoke in a summary manner. "It's clear enough he wants her."

"There's something so odd about him," Lady Canterville answered. "Fancy his speaking so about settlements!"

"You had better give him his head. He'll go much quieter."

"He's so obstinate—very obstinate; it's easy to see that. And he seems to think," she went on, "that a girl in your daughter's position can be married from one day to the other—with a ring and a new frock—like a housemaid."

"Well that, of course, over there is the kind of thing. But he seems really to have a most extraordinary fortune, and every one does say they give their women *carte blanche*."

"*Carte blanche* is not what Barb wants; she wants a settlement. She wants a definite income," said Lady Canterville; "she wants to be safe."

He looked at her rather straight. "Has she told you so? I thought you said—" And then he stopped. "I beg your pardon," he added.

She didn't explain her inconsequence; she only remarked that American fortunes were notoriously insecure; one heard of nothing else; they melted away like smoke. It was their own duty to their child to demand that something should be fixed.

Well, he met this in his way. "He has a million and a half sterling. I can't make out what he does with it."

She rose to it without a flutter. "Our child should have, then, something very handsome."

"I agree, my dear; but you must manage it; you must consider it; you must send for Hardman. Only take care you don't put him off; it may be a very good opening, you know. There's a great deal to be done out there; I believe in all that,"

LADY BARBARINA

Lord Canterville went on in the tone of a conscientious parent.

"There's no doubt that he is a doctor—in some awful place," his wife brooded.

"He may be a pedlar for all I care."

"If they should go out I think Agatha might go with them," her ladyship continued in the same tone, but a little disconnectedly.

"You may send them all out if you like. Good-bye!"

The pair embraced, but her hand detained him a moment.

"Don't you think he's greatly in love?"

"Oh yes, he's very bad—but he's a sharp little beggar."

"She certainly quite likes him," Lady Canterville stated rather formally as they separated.

4

JACKSON LEMON had said to Dr. Feeder in the Park that he would call on Mr. and Mrs. Freer; but three weeks were to elapse before he knocked at their door in Jermyn Street. In the meantime he had met them at dinner and Mrs. Freer had told him how much she hoped he would find time to come and see her. She had not reproached him or shaken her finger at him, and her clemency, which was calculated and very characteristic of her, touched him so much—for he was in fault, she was one of his mother's oldest and best friends—that he very soon presented himself. It was on a fine Sunday afternoon, rather late, and the region of Jermyn Street looked forsaken and inanimate; the native dullness of the brick scenery reigned undisputed. Mrs. Freer, however, was at home, resting on a lodging-house sofa—an angular couch draped in faded chintz—before she went to dress for dinner. She made the young man very welcome; she told him again how much she had been thinking of him; she had longed so for a chance to talk with him. He immediately guessed what she had in her mind, and he then remembered that Sidney Feeder had named to him what it was this pair took upon themselves to say. This had provoked him at the time, but he had forgotten it afterward; partly because he became aware that same night of his wanting to make the "young marchioness" his own and partly because since then he had suffered much greater annoyance. Yes, the poor young man, so conscious of liberal intentions, of a large way of looking at the future, had had much to irritate and disgust him. He had seen the mistress of his affections but three or four times, and had received a letter from Mr. Hardman, Lord Canterville's

solicitor, asking him, in terms the most obsequious it was true, to designate some gentleman of the law with whom the preliminaries of his marriage to Lady Barbarina Clement might be arranged. He had given Mr. Hardman the name of such a functionary, but he had written by the same post to his own solicitor—for whose services in other matters he had had much occasion, Jackson Lemon being distinctly contentious—instructing him that he was at liberty to meet that gentleman, but not at liberty to entertain any proposals as to the odious English idea of a settlement. If marrying Jackson Lemon wasn't settlement enough the house of Canterville had but to alter their point of view. It was quite out of the question he should alter his. It would perhaps be difficult to explain the strong dislike he entertained to the introduction into his prospective union of this harsh diplomatic element ; it was as if they mistrusted him and suspected him ; as if his hands were to be tied so that he shouldn't be able to handle his own fortune as he thought best. It wasn't the idea of parting with his money that displeased him, for he flattered himself he had plans of expenditure for his wife beyond even the imagination of her distinguished parents. It struck him even that they were fools not to have felt subtly sure they should make a much better thing of it by leaving him perfectly free. This intervention of the solicitor was a nasty little English tradition—totally at variance with the large spirit of American habits—to which he wouldn't submit. It wasn't his way to submit when he disapproved : why should he change his way on this occasion when the matter lay so near him ?

These reflexions and a hundred more had flowed freely through his mind for several days before his call in Jermyn Street, and they had engendered a lively indignation and a bitter sense of wrong. They had even introduced, as may be imagined, a certain awkwardness into his relations with the house of Canterville, of which indeed it may be said that these amenities were for the moment virtually suspended. His first interview with Lady Barb after his conference with the old couple, as he called her august elders, had been as frank, had been as sweet, as he could have desired. Lady Canterville had at the end of three days sent him an invitation—five words on a card—asking him to dine with them on the morrow quite *en famille*. This had been the only formal intimation that his engagement to her daughter was recognised ; for even at the family banquet, which included half a dozen guests of pleasant address but vague affiliation, there had been no reference on the part either of his host or his hostess to the subject in their converse in Lord Canterville's den. The

only allusion was a wandering ray, once or twice, in Lady Barb's own fine eyes. When, however, after dinner, she strolled away with him into the music-room which was lighted and empty, to play for him something out of "Carmen," of which he had spoken at table, and when the young couple were allowed to enjoy for upwards of an hour, unmolested, the comparative privacy of that elegant refuge, he felt Lady Canterville definitely to count on him. She didn't believe in any serious difficulties. Neither did he then ; and that was why it was not to be condoned that there should be a vain appearance of them. The arrangements, he supposed her ladyship would have said, were pending, and indeed they were ; for he had already given orders in Bond Street for the setting of an extraordinary number of diamonds. Lady Barb, at any rate, during that hour he spent with her, had had nothing to say about arrangements ; and it had been an hour of pure satisfaction. She had seated herself at the piano and played perpetually, in a soft incoherent manner, while he leaned over the instrument, very close to her, and said everything that came into his head. She was braver and handsomer than ever and looked at him as if she liked him out and out.

This was all he expected of her, for it didn't belong to the cast of her beauty to betray a vulgar infatuation. That beauty was clearly all he had believed it from the first, and with something now thrown in, something ever so touching and stirring, which seemed to stamp her from that moment as his precious possession. He felt more than ever her intimate value and the great social outlay it had taken to produce such a mixture. Simple and girlish as she was, and not particularly quick in the give and take of conversation, she seemed to him to have a part of the history of England in her blood ; she was the fine flower of generations of privileged people and of centuries of rich country-life. Between these two of course was no glance of the question which had been put into the hands of Mr. Hardman, and the last thing that occurred to Jackson was that Lady Barb had views as to his settling a fortune upon her before their marriage. It may appear odd, but he hadn't asked himself whether his money operated on her in any degree as a bribe ; and this was because, instinctively, he felt such a speculation idle—the point was essentially not to be ascertained—and because he was quite ready to take it for agreeable to her to continue to live in luxury. It was eminently agreeable to him to have means to enable her to do so. He was acquainted with the mingled character of human motives and glad he was rich enough to pretend to the hand of a young woman who, for the best of reasons, would be very expensive.

After the good passage in the music-room he had ridden with her twice, but hadn't found her otherwise accessible. She had let him know the second time they rode that Lady Canterville had directed her to make, for the moment, no further appointment with him ; and on his presenting himself more than once at the house he had been told that neither the mother nor the daughter was at home ; it had been added that Lady Barb was staying at Roehampton. In touching on that restriction she had launched at him just a distinguished mute reproach—there was always a certain superior dumbness in her eyes—as if he were exposing her to an annoyance she ought to be spared, or taking an eccentric line on a question that all well-bred people treated in the conventional way.

His induction from this was not that she wished to be secure about his money, but that, like a dutiful English daughter, she received her opinions—on points that were indifferent to her—ready-made from a mamma whose fallibility had never been exposed. He knew by this that his solicitor had answered Mr. Hardman's letter and that Lady Canterville's coolness was the fruit of the correspondence. The effect of it was not in the least to make him come round, as he phrased it ; he had not the smallest intention of doing that. Lady Canterville had spoken of the traditions of her family ; but he had no need to go to his family for his own. They resided within himself ; anything he had once undiscussably made up his mind to acquired in three minutes the force, and with that the due dignity of a tradition. Meanwhile he was in the detestable position of not knowing whether or not he were engaged. He wrote to Lady Barb to clear it up, to smooth it down—it being so strange she shouldn't receive him ; and she addressed him in return a very pretty little letter, which had to his mind a fine by-gone quality, an old-fashioned, a last-century freshness that might have flowed, a little thinly, from the pen of Clarissa or Sophia. She professed that she didn't in the least understand the situation ; that of course she would never give him up ; that her mother had said there were the best reasons for their not going too fast ; that, thank God, she was yet young and could wait as long as he would ; but that she begged he wouldn't write her about money-matters : she had never been able to count even on her fingers. He felt in no danger whatever of making this last mistake ; he only noted how Lady Barb thought it natural there should be a discussion ; and this made it vivid to him afresh that he had got hold of a daughter of the Crusaders. His ingenious mind could appreciate this hereditary assumption at the very same time that,

to light his own footsteps, it remained entirely modern. He believed—or he thought he believed—that in the end he should marry this gorgeous girl on his own terms ; but in the interval there was a sensible indignity in being challenged and checked. One effect of it indeed was to make him desire the young woman more intensely. When she wasn't before his eyes in the flesh she hovered before him as an image, and this image had reasons of its own for making him at hours fairly languid with love.

There were moments, however, when he wearied of the mere enshrined memory—it was too impalpable and too thankless. Then it befell that Jackson Lemon for the first time in his life dropped and gave way—gave way, that is, to the sense of sadness. He felt alone in London, and very much out of it, in spite of all the acquaintances he had made and the bills he had paid ; he felt the need of a greater intimacy than any he had formed—save of course in the case of Lady Barb. He wanted to vent his disgust, to relieve himself, from the New York point of view. He felt that in engaging in a contest with the great house of Canterville he was after all rather single. That singleness was of course in a great measure an inspiration ; but it pinched him hard at moments. Then it would have pleased him could his mother have been near ; he used to talk of his affairs a great deal with this delightful parent, who had a delicate way of advising him in the sense he liked best. He had even gone so far as to wish he had never laid eyes on Lady Barb, but had fallen in love instead with some one or other of the rarer home-products. He presently came back of course to the knowledge that in the United States there was—and there could be—nothing nearly so rare as the young lady who had in fact appealed to him so straight, for was it not precisely as a high resultant of the English climate and the British Constitution that he valued her ? He had relieved himself from his New York point of view, by speaking his mind to Lady Beauchemin who confessed that she was infinitely vexed with her parents. She agreed with him that they had made a great mistake ; they ought to have left him free ; and she expressed her confidence that such freedom could only have been, in him, for her family, like the silence of the sage, golden. He must let them down easily, must remember that what was asked of him had been their custom for centuries. She didn't mention her authority as to the origin of customs, but she promised him she would say three words to her father and mother which would make it all right. Jackson answered that customs were all very well, but that really intelligent people recognised at sight, and then indeed quite enjoyed, the right occasion for departing from

them ; and with this he awaited the result of Lady Beauchemin's remonstrance. It had not as yet been perceptible, and it must be said that this charming woman was herself not quite at ease.

When on her venturing to hint to her mother that she thought a wrong line had been taken with regard to her sister's *prétendant*, Lady Canterville had replied that Mr. Lemon's unwillingness to settle anything was in itself a proof of what they had feared, the unstable nature of his fortune—since it was useless to talk (this gracious lady could be very decided) as if there could be any serious reason but that one—on meeting this argument, as I say, Jackson's protectress felt considerably baffled. It was perhaps true, as her mother said, that if they didn't insist upon proper pledges Barbarina might be left in a few years with nothing but the stars and stripes—this odd phrase was a quotation from Mr. Lemon—to cover her withal. Lady Beauchemin tried to reason it out with Lady Marmaduke ; but these were complications unforeseen by Lady Marmaduke in her project of an Anglo-American society. She was obliged to confess that Mr. Lemon's fortune couldn't have the solidity of long-established things ; it was a very new fortune indeed. His father had made the greater part of it all in a lump, a few years before his death, in the extraordinary way in which people made money in America ; that of course was why the son had those singular professional attributes. He had begun to study to be a doctor very young, before his expectations were so great. Then he had found he was very clever and very fond of it, and had kept on because after all, in America, where there were no country gentlemen, a young man had to have something to do, didn't you know ? And Lady Marmaduke, like an enlightened woman, intimated that in such a case she thought it in much better taste not to try to sink anything. " Because in America, don't you see ? " she reasoned, " you can't sink it—nothing *will* sink. Everything's floating about—in the newspapers." And she tried to console her friend by remarking that if Mr. Lemon's fortune was precarious it was at all events so big. That was just the trouble for Lady Beauchemin, it was so big and yet they were going to lose it. He was as obstinate as a mule ; she was sure he would never come round. Lady Marmaduke declared he really *would* come round ; she even offered to bet a dozen pair of *gants de Suède* on it ; and she added that this consummation lay quite in the hands of Barbarina. Lady Beauchemin promised herself to contend with her sister, as it was not for nothing she had herself caught the glamour of her friend's international scheme. •

Jackson Lemon, to dissipate his chagrin, had returned to the

sessions of the medical congress, where, inevitably, he had fallen into the hands of Sidney Feeder, who enjoyed in this disinterested assembly the highest esteem. It was Dr. Feeder's earnest desire that his old friend should share his credit—all the more easily that the medical congress was, as the young physician observed, a perpetual symposium. Jackson entertained the entire body at dinner—entertained it profusely and in a manner befitting one of the patrons of science rather than the humbler votaries ; but these dissipations made him forget but for the hour the arrest of his relations with the house of Canterville. It punctually came back to him that he was disconcerted, and Dr. Feeder saw it stamped on his brow. Jackson Lemon, with his acute inclination to open himself, was on the point more than once of taking this sturdy friend into his confidence. His colleague gave him easy occasion—asked him what it was he was thinking of all the time and whether the young marchioness had concluded she couldn't swallow a doctor. These forms of speech were displeasing to our baffled aspirant, whose fastidiousness was nothing new ; but he had even deeper reasons for saying to himself that in such complicated cases as his there was no assistance in the Sidney Feeders. To understand his situation one must know the world, and the children of Cincinnati, prohibitively provincial, didn't know the world—at least the world with which this son of New York was now concerned.

"Is there a hitch in your marriage? Just tell me that," Sidney Feeder had said, taking things for granted in a manner that of itself testified to an innocence abysmal. It is true he had added that he supposed he had no business to ask ; but he had been anxious about it ever since hearing from Mr. and Mrs. Freer that the British aristocracy was down on the medical profession. "Do they want you to give it up? Is that what the hitch is about? Don't desert your colours, Jackson. The suppression of pain, the mitigation of misery, constitute surely the noblest profession in the world."

"My dear fellow, you don't know what you're talking about," Jackson could only observe in answer to this. "I haven't told any one I was going to be married—still less have I told any one that any one objects to my profession. I should like to see any one do it. I've rather got out of the swim, but I don't regard myself as the sort of person that people object to. And I do expect to do something yet."

"Come home, then, and do it. 'And don't crush me with grandeur if I say that the facilities for getting married are much greater over there.'"

"You don't seem to have found them very great," Jackson sniffed.

"I've never had time really to go into them. But wait till my next vacation and you'll see."

"The facilities over there are too great. Nothing's worth while but what's difficult," said Jackson with a sententious ring that quite distressed his mate.

"Well, they've got their backs up, I can see that. I'm glad you like it. Only if they despise your profession what will they say to that of your friends? If they think you're queer what would they think of me?" asked Sidney Feeder, whose spirit was not as a general thing in the least bitter, but who was pushed to this sharpness by a conviction that—in spite of declarations which seemed half an admission and half a denial—his friend was suffering worry, or really perhaps something almost like humiliation, for the sake of a good that might be gathered at home on every bush.

"My dear fellow, all that's 'rot'!" This had been Jackson's retort, which expressed, however, not half his feeling. The other half was inexpressible, or almost, springing as it did from his depth of displeasure at its having struck even so genial a mind as Sidney Feeder's that in proposing to marry a daughter of the highest civilisation he was going out of his way—departing from his natural line. Was he then so ignoble, so pledged to inferior things, that when he saw a girl who—putting aside the fact that she hadn't genius, which was rare, and which, though he prized rarity, he didn't want—seemed to him the most naturally and functionally founded and seated feminine subject he had known, he was to think himself too different, too incongruous, to mate with her? He would mate with whom he "damn pleased"; that was the upshot of Jackson Lemon's passion. Several days elapsed during which everybody—even the pure-minded, like poor Sidney—seemed to him very abject.

All of which is recorded to show how he, in going to see Mrs. Freer, was prepared much less to be angry with people who, like her husband and herself a month before, had given it out that he was engaged to a peer's daughter, than to resent the insinuation that there were obstacles to such a prospect. He sat with the Lady of Jermyn Street alone for half an hour in the sabbatical stillness. Her husband had gone for a walk in the Park—he always walked in the Park of a Sunday. All the world might have been there and Jackson and Mrs. Freer in sole possession of the district of Saint James's. This perhaps had something to do with making him at last so confidential; they had such a margin for easy

egotism and spreading sympathy. Mrs. Freer was ready for anything—in the critical, the “real” line ; she treated him as a person she had known from the age of ten ; asked his leave to continue recumbent ; talked a great deal about his mother and seemed almost, for a while, to perform the earnest functions of that lady. It had been wise of her from the first not to allude, even indirectly, to his having neglected so long to call ; her silence on this point was in the best taste. Jackson had forgotten how it was a habit with her, and indeed a high accomplishment, never to reproach people with these omissions. You might have left her alone for months or years, her greeting was always the same ; she never was either too delighted to see you or not delighted enough. After a while, however, he felt her silence to be in some measure an allusion ; she appeared to take for granted his devoting all his hours to a certain young lady. It came over him for a moment that his compatriots took a great deal for granted ; but when Mrs. Freer, rather abruptly sitting up on her sofa, said to him half-simply, half-solemnly : “ And now, my dear Jackson, I want you to tell me something ! ”—he saw that, after all, she kept within bounds and didn’t pretend to know more about his business than he himself did. In the course of a quarter of an hour—so appreciatively she listened—he had given her much information. It was the first time he had said so much to any one, and the process relieved him even more than he would have supposed. There were things it made clear to him by bringing them to a point—above all, the fact that he had been wronged. He made no mention whatever of its being out of the usual way that, as an American doctor, he should sue for the hand of a marquis’s daughter ; and this reserve was not voluntary, it was quite unconscious. His mind was too full of the sudden rudeness of the Cantervilles and the sordid side of their want of confidence.

He couldn’t imagine that while he talked to Mrs. Freer—and it amazed him afterwards that he should have chattered so ; he could account for it but by the state of his nerves—she should be thinking only of the strangeness of the situation he sketched for her. She thought Americans as good as other people, but she didn’t see where, in American life, the daughter of a marquis would, as she phrased it, work in. To take a simple instance—they coursed through Mrs. Freer’s mind with extraordinary speed—wouldn’t she always expect to go in to dinner first ? As a novelty and for a change, over there, they might like to see her do it—there might be even a pressure for places at the show. But with the increase of every kind of sophistication that was

taking place in America the humorous view to which she would owe her immediate ease mightn't continue to be taken ; and then where would poor Lady Barb be ? This was in truth a scant instance ; but Mrs. Freer's vivid imagination—much as she had lived in Europe she knew her native land so well—saw a host of others massing themselves behind it. The consequence of all of which was that after listening to her young friend in the most engaging silence she raised her clasped hands, pressed them against her breast, lowered her voice to a tone of entreaty and, with all the charming cheer of her wisdom, uttered three words : “ My dear Jackson, don't—don't—don't.”

“ Don't what ? ” He took it at first coldly.

“ Don't neglect the chance you have of getting out of it. You see it would never do.”

He knew what she meant by his chance of getting out of it ; he had in his many meditations of course not overlooked that. The ground the old couple had taken about settlements—and the fact that Lady Beauchemin hadn't come back to him to tell him, as she promised, that she had moved them, proved how firmly they were rooted—would have offered an all-sufficient pretext to a man who should have repented of his advances. Jackson knew this, but knew at the same time that he had not repented. The old couple's want of imagination didn't in the least alter the fact that the girl, was, in her perfection, as he had told her father, one of the rarest of types. Therefore he simply said to Mrs. Freer that he didn't in the least wish to get out of it ; he was as much in it as ever and intended to remain in it. But what did she mean, he asked in a moment, by her statement that it would never do ? Why wouldn't it do ? Mrs. Freer replied by another question—should he really like her to tell him ? It wouldn't do because Lady Barb wouldn't be satisfied with her place at dinner. She wouldn't be content—in a society of commoners—with any but the best ; and the best she couldn't expect (and it was to be supposed he didn't expect her) always grossly to monopolise ; as people of her sort, for that matter, did so successfully grab it in England.

“ What do you mean by commoners ? ” Jackson rather grimly demanded.

“ I mean you and me and my poor husband and Dr. Feeder,” said Mrs. Freer.

“ I don't see how there can be commoners where there aren't lords. It's the lord that makes the commoner, and *vice versa*.”

“ Won't a lady do as well ? Our Lady Barb—a single English girl—can make a million inferiors.”

"She will be, before anything else, my wife ; and she won't on the whole think it any less vulgar to talk about inferiors than I do myself."

"I don't know what she'll talk about, my dear Jackson, but she'll think ; and her thoughts won't be pleasant—I mean for others. Do you expect to sink her to your own rank ?"

Dr. Lemon's bright little eyes rested more sharply on his hostess. "I don't understand you and don't think you understand yourself." This was not absolutely candid, for he did understand Mrs. Freer to a certain extent ; it has been related that before he asked Lady Barb's hand of her parents there had been moments when he himself doubted if a flower only to be described as of the social hothouse, that is of aristocratic air, would flourish in American earth. But an intimation from another person that it was beyond his power to pass off his wife—whether she were the daughter of a peer or of a shoemaker—set all his blood on fire. It quenched on the instant his own perception of difficulties of detail and made him feel only that he was dishonoured—he the heir of all the ages—by such insinuations. It was his belief—though he had never before had occasion to put it forward—that his position, one of the best in the world, had about it the felicity that makes everything possible. He had had the best education the age could offer, for if he had rather wasted his time at Harvard, where he entered very young, he had, as he believed, been tremendously serious at Heidelberg and at Vienna. He had devoted himself to one of the noblest professions—a profession recognised as such everywhere but in England—and had inherited a fortune far beyond the expectations of his earlier years, the years when he cultivated habits of work which alone (or rather in combination with talents that he neither exaggerated nor undervalued) would have conduced to distinction. He was one of the most fortunate inhabitants of an immense fresh rich country, a country whose future was admitted to be incalculable, and he moved with perfect ease in a society in which he was not overshadowed by others. It seemed to him, therefore, beneath his dignity to wonder whether he could afford, socially speaking, to marry according to his taste. He pretended to general strength, and what was the use of strength if you weren't prepared to undertake things timid people might find difficult ? It was his plan to marry the woman he desired and not be afraid of her afterward. The effect of Mrs. Freer's doubt of his success was to represent to him that his own character wouldn't cover his wife's ; she couldn't have made him feel worse if she had told him that he was marrying beneath him and would have to ask for indulgence. "I don't

believe you know how much I think that any woman who marries me will be doing very well," he promptly added.

"I'm very sure of that ; but it isn't so simple—one's being an American," Mrs. Freer rejoined with a small philosophic sigh.

"It's whatever one chooses to make it."

"Well, you'll make it what no one has done yet if you take that young lady to America and make her happy there."

"Do you think our country, then, such a very dreadful place ?"

His hostess had a pause. "It's not a question of what I think, but of what she will."

Jackson rose from his chair and took up his hat and stick. He had actually turned a little pale with the force of his emotion ; there was a pang of wrath for him in this fact that his marriage to Lady Barbarina might be looked at as too high a flight. He stood a moment leaning against the mantelpiece and very much tempted to say to Mrs. Freer that she was a vulgar-minded old woman. But he said something that was really more to the point. "You forget that she'll have her consolations."

"Don't go away or I shall think I've offended you. You can't console an injured noblewoman."

"How will she be injured ? People will be charming to her."

"They'll be charming to her—charming to her !" These words fell from the lips of Dexter Freer, who had opened the door of the room and stood with the knob in his hand, putting himself into relation to his wife's talk with their visitor. This harmony was achieved in an instant. "Of course I know whom you mean," he said while he exchanged greetings with Jackson. "My wife and I—naturally we're great busybodies—have talked of your affair and we differ about it completely. She sees only the dangers, while I see the advantages."

"By the advantages he means the fun for us," Mrs. Freer explained, settling her sofa-cushions.

Jackson looked with a certain sharp blankness from one of these disinterested judges to the other ; even yet they scarce saw how their misdirected freedom wrought on him. It was hardly more agreeable to him to know that the husband wished to see Lady Barb in America than to know the wife waved away such a vision. There was that in Dexter Freer's face which seemed to forecast the affair as taking place somehow for the benefit of the spectators. "I think you both see too much—a great deal too much—in the whole thing," he rather coldly returned.

"My dear young man, at my age I may take certain liberties," said Dexter Freer. "Do what you've planned—I beseech you to do it ; it has never been done before." And then as if Jackson's

glance had challenged this last assertion he went on : " Never, I assure you, this particular thing. Young female members of the British aristocracy have married coachmen and fishmongers and all that sort of thing ; but they've never married you and me."

" They certainly haven't married the ' likes ' of either of you ! " said Mrs. Freer.

" I'm much obliged to you for your advice." It may be thought that Jackson Lemon took himself rather seriously, and indeed I'm afraid that if he hadn't done so there would have been no occasion even for this summary report of him. But it made him almost sick to hear his engagement spoken of as a curious and ambiguous phenomenon. He might have his own ideas about it—one always had about one's engagement ; but the ideas that appeared to have peopled the imagination of his friends ended by kindling a small hot expanse in each of his cheeks. " I'd rather not talk any more about my little plans," he added to his host. " I've been saying all sorts of absurd things to Mrs. Freer."

" They've been most interesting and most infuriating," that lady declared. " You've been very stupidly treated."

" May she tell me when you go ? " her husband asked of the young man.

" I'm going now—she may tell you whatever she likes."

" I'm afraid we've displeased you," she went on ; " I've said too much what I think. You must pardon me—it's all for your mother."

" It's she whom I want Lady Barb to see ! " Jackson exclaimed with the inconsequence of filial affection.

" Deary me ! " Mrs. Freer gently wailed.

" We shall go back to America to see how you get on," her husband said ; " and if you succeed it will be a great precedent ! "

" Oh, I shall succeed ! " And with this he took his departure. He walked away with the quick step of a man labouring under a certain excitement ; walked up to Piccadilly and down past Hyde Park Corner. It relieved him to measure these distances, for he was thinking hard, under the influence of irritation, and it was as if his movement phrased his passion. Certain lights flashed on him in the last half-hour turned to fire in him ; the more that they had a representative value and were an echo of the common voice. If his prospects wore that face to Mrs. Freer they would probably wear it to others ; so he felt a strong sharp need to show such others that they took a mean measure of his position. He walked and walked till he found himself on the highway of Hammersmith. I have represented him as a young man with a stiff back, and I may appear to undermine this plea when I note

LADY BARBARINA

that he wrote that evening to his solicitor that Mr. Hardman was to be informed he would agree to any proposals for settlements that this worthy should make. Jackson's stiff back was shown in his deciding to marry Lady Barbarina on any terms. It had come over him through the action of this desire to prove he wasn't afraid—so odious was the imputation—that terms of any kind were very superficial things. What was fundamental and of the essence of the matter would be to secure the grand girl and *then* carry everything out.

5

"ON Sundays now you might be at home," he said to his wife in the following month of March—more than six months after his marriage.

"Are the people any nicer on Sundays than they are on other days?" Lady Barb asked from the depths of her chair and without looking up from a stiff little book.

He waited ever so briefly before answering. "I don't know whether they are, but I think you might be."

"I'm as nice as I know how to be. You must take me as I am. You knew when you married me that I wasn't American."

Jackson stood before the fire toward which his wife's face was turned and her feet extended; stood there some time with his hands behind him and his eyes dropped a little obliquely on Lady Barb's bent head and richly-draped figure. It may be said without delay, that he was sore of soul, and it may be added that he had a double cause. He knew himself on the verge of the first crisis that had occurred between himself and his wife—the reader will note that it had occurred rather promptly—and he was annoyed at his annoyance. A glimpse of his state of mind before his marriage has been given the reader, who will remember that at that period our young man had believed himself lifted above possibilities of irritation. When one was strong one wasn't fidgety, and a union with a species of calm goddess would of course be a source of repose. Lady Barb was a calm, was an even calmer goddess still, and he had a much more intimate view of her divinity than on the day he had led her to the altar; but I'm not sure he felt either as firm or as easy.

"How do you know what people are?" he said in a moment. "You've seen so few; you're perpetually denying yourself. If you should leave New York to-morrow you'd know wonderfully little about it."

LADY BARBARINA

"It's all just the same," she pleaded. "The people are all exactly alike. There's only one sort."

"How can you tell? You never see them."

"Didn't I go out every night for the first two months we were here?"

"It was only to about a dozen houses—those, I agree, always the same; people, moreover, you had already met in London. You've got no general impressions."

She raised her beautiful blank face. "That's just what I *have* got; I had them before I came. I see no difference whatever. They've just the same names—just the same manners."

Again for an instant Jackson hung fire; then he said with that practised flat candour of which mention has already been made and which he sometimes used in London during his courtship: "Don't you like it over here?"

Lady Barb had returned to her book, but she looked up again. "Did you expect me to like it?"

"I hoped you would, of course. I think I told you so."

"I don't remember. You said very little about it; you seemed to make a kind of mystery. I knew of course you expected me to live here, but I didn't know you expected me to like it."

"You thought I asked of you the sacrifice, as it were."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Lady Barb. She got up from her chair and tossed her unconsolatory volume into the empty seat. "I recommend you to read that book," she added.

"Is it interesting?"

"It's an American novel."

"I never read novels."

"You had really better look at that one. It will show you the kind of people you want me to know."

"I've no doubt it's very vulgar," Jackson said. "I don't see why you read it."

"What else can I do? I can't always be riding in the Park. I hate the Park," she quite rang out.

"It's just as good as your own," said her husband.

She glanced at him with a certain quickness, her eyebrows slightly lifted. "Do you mean the park at Pasterns?"

"No; I mean the park in London."

"Oh, I don't care about London. One was only in London a few weeks." She had a horrible lovely ease.

Yet he but wanted to help her to turn round. "I suppose you miss the country," he suggested. It was his idea of life that he shouldn't be afraid of anything, not be afraid, in any situation, of knowing the worst that was to be known about it; and the

demon of a courage with which discretion was not properly commingled prompted him to take soundings that were perhaps not absolutely necessary for safety and yet that revealed unmistakable rocks. It was useless to know about rocks if he couldn't avoid them ; the only thing was to trust to the wind.

" I don't know what I miss. I think I miss everything ! " This was his wife's answer to his too-curious inquiry. It wasn't peevish, for that wasn't the tone of a calm goddess ; but it expressed a good deal—a good deal more than Lady Barb, who was rarely eloquent, had expressed before. Nevertheless, though his question had been precipitate, Jackson said to himself that he might take his time to think over what her fewness of words enclosed ; he couldn't help seeing that the future would give him plenty of chance. He was in no hurry to ask himself whether poor Mrs. Freer, in Jermyn Street, mightn't after all have been right in saying that when it came to marrying an English caste-product it wasn't so simple to be an American doctor—it might avail little even in such a case to be the heir of all the ages. The transition was complicated, but in his bright mind it was rapid, from the brush of a momentary contact with such ideas to certain considerations which led him to go on after an instant : " Should you like to go down into Connecticut ? "

" Into Connecticut ? "

" That's one of our States. It's about as large as Ireland. I'll take you there if you like."

" What does one do there ? "

" We can try and get some hunting."

" You and I alone ? "

" Perhaps we can get a party to join us."

" The people in the State ? "

" Yes—we might propose it to them."

" The tradespeople in the towns ? "

" Very true—they'll have to mind their shops," Jackson said. " But we might hunt alone."

" Are there any foxes ? "

" No, but there are a few old cows."

Lady Barb had already noted that her husband sought the relief of a laugh at her expense, and she was aware that this present opportunity was neither worse nor better than some others. She didn't mind that trick in him particularly now, though in England it would have disgusted her ; she had the consciousness of virtue, an immense comfort, and flattered herself she had learned the lesson of an altered standard of fitness—besides which there were so many more disagreeable things in

America than being laughed at by one's husband. But she pretended not to like it because this made him stop, and above all checked discussion, which with Jackson was habitually so facetious and consequently so tiresome. "I only want to be left alone," she said in answer—though indeed it hadn't the style of an answer—to his speech about the cows. With this she wandered away to one of the windows that looked out on the Fifth Avenue. She was very fond of these windows and had taken a great fancy to the Fifth Avenue, which, in the high-pitched winter weather, when everything sparkled, was bright and funny and foreign. It will be seen that she was not wholly unjust to her adoptive country : she found it delightful to look out of the window. This was a pleasure she had enjoyed in London only in the most furtive manner ; it wasn't the kind of thing that girls in England did. Besides, in London, in Hill Street, there was nothing particular to see ; whereas in the Fifth Avenue everything and every one went by, and observation was made consistent with dignity by the quantities of brocade and lace dressing the embrasure, which somehow wouldn't have been tidy in England and which made an ambush without concealing the brilliant day. Hundreds of women—the queer women of New York, who were unlike any that Lady Barb had hitherto seen—passed the house every hour ; and her ladyship was infinitely entertained and mystified by the sight of their clothes. She spent more time than she was aware of in this recreation, and had she been addicted to returning upon herself, to asking herself for an account of her conduct—an inquiry she didn't indeed completely neglect, but made no great form of—she must have had a wan smile for this proof of what she appeared mainly to have come to America for, conscious though she was that her tastes were very simple and that so long as she didn't hunt it didn't much matter what she did.

Her husband turned about to the fire, giving a push with his foot to a log that had fallen out of its place. Then he said—and the connexion with the words she had just uttered was direct enough—"You really must manage to be at home on Sundays, you know. I used to like that so much in London. All the best women here do it. You had better begin to-day. I'm going to see my mother. If I meet any one I'll tell them to come."

"Tell them not to talk so much," said Lady Barb among her lace curtains.

"Ah, my dear," Jackson returned, "it isn't every one who has your concision." And he went and stood behind her in the window, putting his arm round her waist. It was as much of a

LADY BARBARINA

satisfaction to him as it had been six months before, at the time the solicitors were settling the matter, that this flower of an ancient stem should be worn upon his own breast ; he still thought its fragrance a thing quite apart, and it was as clear as day to him that his wife was the handsomest woman in New York. He had begun, after their arrival, by telling her this very often ; but the assurance brought no colour to her cheek, no light to her eyes : to be the handsomest woman in New York, now that she was acquainted with that city, plainly failed to strike her as a position in life. The reader may, moreover, be informed that, oddly enough, Lady Barb didn't particularly believe this assertion. There were some very pretty women in New York, and without in the least wishing to be like them—she had seen no woman in America whom she desired to resemble—she envied them some of their peculiar little freshnesses. It's probable that her own finest points were those of which she was most unconscious. But Jackson was intensely aware of all of them ; nothing could exceed the minuteness of his appreciation of his wife. It was a sign of this that after he had stood behind her a moment he kissed her very tenderly. "Have you any message for my mother ?" he asked.

"Please give her my love. And you might take her that book."

"What book ?"

"That nasty one I've been reading."

"Oh, bother your books !" he cried with a certain irritation as he went out of the room.

There had been a good many things in her life in New York that cost her an effort, but sending her love to her mother-in-law was not one of these. She liked Mrs. Lemon better than any one she had seen in America ; she was the only person who seemed to Lady Barb really simple, as she herself understood that quality. Many people had struck her as homely and rustic and many others as pretentious and vulgar ; but in Jackson's mother she had found the golden mean of a discretion, of a native felicity and modesty and decency, which, as she would have said, were really nice. Her sister, Lady Agatha, was even fonder of Mrs. Lemon ; but then Lady Agatha had taken the most extraordinary fancy to every one and everything, and talked as if America were the most delightful country in the world. She was having a lovely time—she already spoke the most beautiful American—and had been, during the bright winter just drawing to a close, the most prominent girl in New York. She had gone out at first with her elder ; but for some weeks past Lady Barb had let so many occasions pass that Agatha threw herself into the arms of

Mrs. Lemon, who found her unsurpassably quaint and amusing and was delighted to take her into society. Mrs. Lemon, as an old woman, had given up such vanities ; but she only wanted a motive, and in her good nature she ordered a dozen new caps and sat smiling against the wall while her little English maid, on polished floors, to the sound of music, cultivated the American step as well as the American tone. There was no trouble in New York about going out, and the winter wasn't half over before the little English maid found herself an accomplished diner, finding her way without any chaperon at all to feasts where she could count on a bouquet at her plate. She had had a great deal of correspondence with her own female parent on this point, and Lady Canterville had at last withdrawn her protest, which in the meantime had been perfectly useless. It was ultimately Lady Canterville's feeling that if she had married the handsomest of her daughters to an American doctor she might let another become a professional *raconteuse*—Agatha had written to her that she was expected to talk so much—strange as such a destiny seemed for a girl of nineteen. Mrs. Lemon had even a higher simplicity than Lady Barb imputed to her ; for she hadn't noticed that Lady Agatha danced much oftener with Herman Longstraw than with any one else. Jackson himself, though he went little to balls, had discovered this truth, and he looked slightly preoccupied when, after he had sat five minutes with his mother on the Sunday afternoon through which I have invited the reader to trace so much more than—I am afraid—is easily apparent of the progress of this simple story, he learned that his sister-in-law was entertaining Mr. Longstraw in the library. That young man had called half an hour before, and she had taken him into the other room to show him the seal of the Cantervilles, which she had fastened to one of her numerous trinkets—she was adorned with a hundred bangles and chains—and the proper exhibition of which required a taper and a stick of wax. Apparently he was examining it very carefully, for they had been absent a good while. Mrs. Lemon's simplicity was further shown by the fact that she had not measured their absence ; it was only when Jackson questioned her that she remembered.

Herman Longstraw was a young Californian who had turned up in New York the winter before and who travelled on his moustache, as they were understood to say in his native State. This moustache and some of its accompanying features were greatly admired ; several ladies in New York had been known to declare that they were as beautiful as a dream. Taken in connection with his tall stature, his familiar good nature and his

remarkable Western vocabulary they constituted his only social capital ; for of the two great divisions, the rich Californians and the poor Californians, it was well known to which he belonged. Doctor Lemon had viewed him as but a slightly mitigated cowboy, and was somewhat vexed at his own parent, though also aware that she could scarcely figure to herself what an effect such a form of speech as this remarkably straight echo of the prairie would produce in the halls of Canterville. He had no desire whatever to play a trick on the house to which he was allied, and knew perfectly that Lady Agatha hadn't been sent to America to become entangled with a Californian of the wrong denomination. He had been perfectly willing to bring her ; he thought, a little vindictively, that this would operate as a hint to her progenitors on what he might have imagined doing if they hadn't been so stupidly bent on Mr. Hardman. Herman Longstraw, according to the legend, had been a trapper, a squatter, a miner, a pioneer—had been everything that one could be in the desperate parts of America, and had accumulated masses of experience before the age of thirty. He had shot bears in the Rockies and buffaloes on the plains ; and it was even believed that he had brought down animals of a still more dangerous kind among the haunts of men. There had been a story that he owned a cattle-ranch in Arizona ; but a later and apparently more authentic version of it, though representing him as looking after the cattle, didn't depict him as their proprietor.

Many of the stories told about him were false ; but there was no doubt his moustache, his native ease and his native accent were the best of their kind. He danced very badly ; but Lady Agatha had frankly told several persons that that was nothing new to her, and in short she delighted—this, however, she didn't tell, in Mr. Herman Longstraw. What she enjoyed in America, was the revelation of freedom, and there was no such proof of freedom as absolutely unrestricted discourse with a gentleman who dressed in crude skins when not in New York and who, in his usual pursuits, carried his life—as well as that of other persons—in his hand. A gentleman whom she had sat next to at dinner in the early part of her visit had remarked to her that the United States were the paradise of women and of mechanics ; and this had seemed to her at the time very abstract, for she wasn't conscious as yet of belonging to either class. In England she had been only a girl, and the principal idea connected with that was simply that for one's misfortune one wasn't a boy. But she presently herself found the odd American world a true sojourn of the youthful blest ; and this helped her to know that she must

be one of the people mentioned in the axiom of her neighbour—people who could do whatever they wanted, had a voice in everything and made their taste and their ideas felt. She saw what fun it was to be a woman in America, and that this was the best way to enjoy the New York winter—the wonderful brilliant New York winter, the queer long-shaped glittering city, the heterogeneous hours among which you couldn't tell the morning from the afternoon or the night from either of them, the perpetual liberties and walks, the rushings-out and the droppings-in, the intimacies, the endearments, the comicalities, the sleigh-bells, the cutters, the sunsets on the snow, the ice-parties in the frosty clearness, the bright hot velvety houses, the bouquets, the bonbons, the little cakes, the big cakes, the irrepressible inspirations of shopping, the innumerable luncheons and dinners offered to youth and innocence, the quantities of chatter of quantities of girls, the perpetual motion of the "German," the suppers at restaurants after the play, the way in which life was pervaded by Delmonico and Delmonico by the sense that though one's hunting was lost, and this therefore so different, it was very nearly as good. In all, through all, flowed a suffusion of loud unmodulated friendly sound which reminded her of an endless tuning of rather bad fiddles.

Lady Agatha was at present staying for a little change with Mrs. Lemon, and such adventures as that were part of the pleasure of her American season. The house was too close, but physically the girl could bear anything, and it was all she had to complain of; for Mrs. Lemon, as we know, thought her a weird little specimen, and had none of those old-world scruples in regard to spoiling young people to which Lady Agatha herself now knew she must in the past have been unduly sacrificed. In her own way—it was not all her sister's way—she liked to be of importance; and this was assuredly the case when she saw that Mrs. Lemon had apparently nothing in the world to do, after spending a part of the morning with her servants, but invent little distractions—many of them of the edible sort—for her guest. She appeared to have several friends, but she had no society to speak of, and the people who entered her house came principally to see Lady Agatha. This, as we have noted, was strikingly the case with Herman Longstraw. The whole situation gave the young stranger a great feeling of success—success of a new and unexpected kind. Of course in England she had been born successful, as it might be called, through her so emerging in one of the most beautiful rooms at Pasterns; but her present triumph was achieved more by her own effort—not that she had tried very

hard—and by her merit. It wasn't so much what she said—since she could never equal for quantity the girls of New York—as the spirit of enjoyment that played in her fresh young face, with its pointless curves, and shone in her grey English eyes. She enjoyed everything, even the street-cars, of which she made liberal use ; and more than everything she enjoyed Mr. Longstraw and his talk about buffaloes and bears. Mrs. Lemon promised to be very careful as soon as her son had begun to warn her ; and this time she had a certain understanding of what she promised. She thought people ought to make the matches they liked ; she had given proof of this in her late behaviour to Jackson, whose own union was, to her sense, marked with all the arbitrariness of pure love. Nevertheless she could see that Herman Longstraw would probably be thought rough in England ; and it wasn't simply that he was so inferior to Jackson, for, after all, certain things were not to be expected. Jackson was not oppressed with his mother-in-law, having taken his precautions against such a danger ; but he was certain he should give Lady Canterville a permanent advantage over him if her third daughter should while in America attach herself to a mere moustache.

It was not always, as I have hinted, that Mrs. Lemon entered completely into the views of her son, though in form she never failed to subscribe to them devoutly. She had never yet, for instance, apprehended his reason for marrying poor Lady Barb. This was a great secret, and she was determined, in her gentleness, that no one should ever know it. For herself, she was sure that to the end of time she shouldn't discover Jackson's reason. She might never ask about it, for that of course would betray her. From the first she had told him she was delighted, there being no need of asking for explanations then, as the young lady herself, when she should come to know her, would explain. But the young lady hadn't yet explained and after this evidently never would. She was very tall, very handsome, she answered exactly to Mrs. Lemon's prefigurement of the daughter of a lord, and she wore her clothes, which were peculiar, but to one of her shape remarkably becoming, very well. But she didn't elucidate ; we know ourselves that there was very little that was explanatory about Lady Barb. So Mrs. Lemon continued to wonder, to ask herself, " Why that one, more than so many others who'd have been more natural ? " The choice struck her, as I have said, as quite arbitrary. She found Lady Barb very different from other girls she had known, and this led her almost immediately to feel sorry for her daughter-in-law. She felt how the girl was to be pitied if she found her husband's people as peculiar as his mother found

her, since the result of that would be to make her very lonesome. Lady Agatha was different, because she seemed to keep nothing back ; you saw all there was of her, and she was evidently not home-sick. Mrs. Lemon could see that Barbarina was ravaged by this latest ailment and was also too haughty to show it. She even had a glimpse of the ultimate truth, namely, that Jackson's wife had not the comfort of crying, because that would have amounted to a confession that she had been idiotic enough to believe in advance that, in an American town, in the society of doctors, she should escape such pangs. Mrs. Lemon treated her with studied consideration—all the indulgence that was due to a young woman in the unfortunate position of having been married one couldn't tell why.

The world, to the elder lady's view, contained two great departments, that of people and that of things ; and she believed you must take an interest either in one or the other. The true incomprehensible in Lady Barb was that she cared for neither side of the show. Her house apparently inspired her with no curiosity and no enthusiasm, though it had been thought magnificent enough to be described in successive columns of the native newspapers ; and she never spoke of her furniture or her domestics, though she had a prodigious show of such possessions. She was the same with regard to her acquaintances, which was immense, inasmuch as every one in the place had called on her. Mrs. Lemon was the least critical woman in the world, but it had occasionally ruffled her just a little that her daughter-in-law should receive every one in New York quite in the same automatic manner. There were differences, Mrs. Lemon knew, and some of them of the highest importance ; but poor Lady Barb appeared never to suspect them. She accepted every one and everything and asked no questions. She had no curiosity about her fellow-citizens, and as she never assumed it for a moment she gave Mrs. Lemon no opportunity to enlighten her. Lady Barb was a person with whom you could do nothing unless she left you an opening ; and nothing would have been more difficult than to "post" her, as her mother-in-law would have said, against her will. Of course she picked up a little knowledge, but she confounded and transposed American attributes in the most extraordinary way. She had a way of calling every one Doctor ; and Mrs. Lemon could scarcely convince her that this distinction was too precious to be so freely bestowed. She had once said to that supporter that in New York there was nothing to know people by, their names were so very monotonous ; and Mrs. Lemon had entered into this enough to see that there was something that stood out a good

deal in Barbarina's own prefix. It is probable that during her short period of domestication complete justice was not done Lady Barb ; she never—as an instance—got credit for repressing her annoyance at the poverty of the nominal signs and styles, a deep desolation. That little speech to her husband's mother was the most reckless sign she gave of it ; and there were few things that contributed more to the good conscience she habitually enjoyed than her self-control on this particular point.

Doctor Lemon was engaged in professional researches just now, which took up a great deal of his time ; and for the rest he passed his hours unreservedly with his wife. For the last three months, therefore, he had seen his other nearest relative scarcely more than once a week. In spite of researches, in spite of medical societies, where Jackson, to her knowledge, read papers, Lady Barb had more of her husband's company than she had counted on at the time she married. She had never known a married pair to be so much together as she and Jackson ; he appeared to expect her to sit with him in the library in the morning. He had none of the occupations of gentlemen and noblemen in England, for the element of politics appeared to be as absent as the element of the chase. There were politics in Washington, she had been told, and even at Albany, and Jackson had proposed to introduce her to these cities ; but the proposal, made to her once at dinner, before several people, had excited such cries of horror that it fell dead on the spot. " We don't want you to see anything of that kind," one of the ladies had said, and Jackson had appeared to be discouraged—that is if in regard to Jackson she could really tell.

" Pray what is it you want me to see ? " Lady Barb had asked on this occasion.

" Well, New York and Boston (Boston if you want to very much, but not otherwise), and then Niagara. But more than anything Newport."

She was tired of their eternal Newport ; she had heard of it a thousand times and felt as if she had lived there half her life ; she was sure, moreover, that she should hate the awful little place. This is perhaps as near as she came to having a lively conviction on any American subject. She asked herself whether she was then to spend her life in the Fifth Avenue with alternations of a city of villas—she detested villas—and wondered if that was all the great American country had to offer her. There were times when she believed she should like the backwoods and that the Far West might be a resource ; for she had analysed her feelings just deep enough to discover that when she had—hesitating a good deal—

LADY BARBARINA

turned over the question of marrying Jackson Lemon it was not in the least of American barbarism she was afraid ; her dread had been all of American civilisation. She judged the little lady I have just quoted a goose, but that didn't make New York any more interesting. It would be reckless to say that she suffered from an overdose of Jackson's company, since she quite felt him her most important social resource. She could talk to him about England, about her own England, and he understood more or less what she wished to say—when she wished to say anything, which was not frequent. There were plenty of other people who talked about England ; but with them the range of allusion was always the hotels, of which she knew nothing, and the shops and the opera and the photographs : they had the hugest appetite for photographs. There were other people who were always wanting her to tell them about Pasterns and the manner of life there and the parties ; but if there was one thing Lady Barb disliked more than another it was describing Pasterns. She had always lived with people who knew of themselves what such a place would be, without demanding these pictorial efforts, proper only, as she vaguely felt, to persons belonging to the classes whose trade was the arts of expression. Lady Barb of course had never gone into it ; but she knew that in her own class the business was not to express but to enjoy, not to represent but to be represented—though indeed this latter liability might involve offence ; for it may be noted that even for an aristocrat Jackson Lemon's wife was aristocratic.

Lady Agatha and her visitor came back from the library in course of time, and Jackson Lemon felt it his duty to be rather cold to Herman Longstraw. It wasn't clear to him what sort of a husband his sister-in-law would do well to look for in America—if there were to be any question of husbands ; but as to that he wasn't bound to be definite provided he should rule out Mr. Longstraw. This gentleman, however, was not given to noticing shades of manner ; he had little observation, but very great confidence.

"I think you had better come home with me," Jackson said to Lady Agatha ; "I guess you've stayed here long enough."

"Don't let him say that, Mrs. Lemon !" the girl cried. "I like being with you so awfully."

"I try to make it pleasant," said Mrs. Lemon. "I should really miss you now ; but perhaps it's your mother's wish." If it was a question of defending her guest from ineligible suitors Mrs. Lemon felt of course that her son was more competent than she ; though she had a surking kindness for Herman Longstraw

and a vague idea that he was a gallant genial specimen of unsophisticated young America.

"Oh, mamma wouldn't see any difference!" Lady Agatha returned with pleading blue eyes on her brother-in-law. "Mamma wants me to see every one; you know she does. That's what she sent me to America for; she knows—for we've certainly told her enough—that it isn't like England. She wouldn't like it if I didn't sometimes stay with people; she always wanted us to stay at other houses. And she knows all about you, Mrs. Lemon, and she likes you immensely. She sent you a message the other day and I'm afraid I forgot to give it you—to thank you for being so kind to me and taking such a lot of trouble. Really she did, but I forgot it. If she wants me to see as much as possible of America it's much better I should be here than always with Barb—it's much less like one's own country. I mean it's much nicer—for a girl," said Lady Agatha affectionately to Mrs. Lemon, who began also to look at Jackson under the influence of this uttered sweetness which was like some quaint little old air, she thought, played upon a faded spinet with two girlish fingers.

"If you want the genuine thing you ought to come out on the plains," Mr. Longstraw interposed with bright sincerity. "I guess that was your mother's idea. Why don't you all come out?" He had been looking intently at Lady Agatha while the remarks I have just repeated succeeded each other on her lips—looking at her with a fascinated approbation, for all the world as if he had been a slightly slow-witted English gentleman and the girl herself a flower of the West, a flower that knew the celebrated language of flowers. Susceptible even as Mrs. Lemon was he made no secret of the fact that Lady Agatha's voice was music to him, his ear being much more accessible than his own inflexions would have indicated. To Lady Agatha those inflexions were not displeasing, partly because, like Mr. Herman himself in general, she had not a perception of shades; and partly because it never occurred to her to compare them with any other tones. He seemed to her to speak a foreign language altogether—a romantic dialect through which the most comical meanings gleamed here and there.

"I should like it above all things," she said in answer to his last observation.

"The scenery's ahead of anything round here," Mr. Longstraw went on.

Mrs. Lemon, as we have gathered, was the mildest of women; but, as an old New Yorker, she had no patience with some of the

new fashions. Chief among these was the perpetual reference, which had become common only within a few years, to the outlying parts of the country, the States and Territories of which children, in her time, used to learn the names, in their order, at school, but which no one ever thought of going to or talking about. Such places, in her opinion, belonged to the geography-books, or at most to the literature of newspapers, but neither to society nor to conversation ; and the change—which, so far as it lay in people's talk, she thought at bottom a mere affectation—threatened to make her native land appear vulgar and vague. For this amiable daughter of Manhattan the normal existence of man, and still more of women, had been “located,” as she would have said, between Trinity Church and the beautiful Reservoir at the top of the Fifth Avenue—monuments of which she was personally proud ; and if we could look into the deeper parts of her mind I am afraid we should discover there an impression that both the countries of Europe and the remainder of her continent were equally far from the centre and the light.

“Well, scenery isn't everything,” she made soft answer to Mr. Longstraw ; “and if Lady Agatha should wish to see anything of that kind all she has got to do is to take the boat up the Hudson.” Mrs. Lemon's recognition of this river, I should say, was all it need have been ; she held the Hudson existed for the purpose of supplying New Yorkers with poetical feelings, helping them to face comfortably occasions like the present and, in general, meet foreigners with confidence—part of the oddity of foreigners being their conceit about their own places.

“That's a good idea, Lady Agatha ; let's take the boat,” said Mr. Longstraw. “I've had great times on the boats.”

Lady Agatha fixed on her *amoroso* her singular charming eyes, eyes of which it was impossible to say at any moment whether they were the shyest or the frankest in the world ; and she was not aware while this contemplation lasted that her brother-in-law was observing her. He was thinking of certain things while he did so, of things he had heard about the English ; who still, in spite of his having married into a family of that nation, appeared to him very much through the medium of hearsay. They were more passionate than the Americans, and they did things that would never have been expected ; though they seemed steadier and less excitable there was much social evidence to prove them more wildly impulsive.

“It's so very kind of you to propose that,” Lady Agatha said in a moment to Mrs. Lemon. “I think I've never been in a ship—except of course coming from England. I'm sure mamma

would wish me to see the Hudson. We used to go in immensely for boating in England."

"Did you boat in a ship?" Herman Longstraw asked, showing his teeth hilariously and pulling his moustache.

"Lots of my mother's people have been in the navy." Lady Agatha perceived vaguely and good-naturedly that she had said something the odd Americans thought odd and that she must justify herself. Something most unnatural was happening to her standard of oddity.

"I really think you had better come back to us," Jackson repeated: "your sister's very lonely without you."

"She's much more lonely *with* me. We're perpetually having differences. Barb's dreadfully vexed because I like America instead of—instead of—" And Lady Agatha paused a moment; for it just occurred to her that this might be treacherous.

"Instead of what?" Jackson inquired.

"Instead of perpetually wanting to go to England, as she does" she went on, only giving her phrase a little softer turn; for she felt for the next moment that Barb could have nothing to hide, and must of course have the courage of her opinions. "Of course England's best, but I daresay I like to be bad," the girl said artlessly.

"Oh, there's no doubt you're awfully bad," Mr. Longstraw broke out, with joyous eagerness. Naturally he couldn't know that what she had principally in mind was an exchange of opinions that had taken place between her sister and herself just before she came to stay with Mrs. Lemon. This incident, of which he himself was the occasion, might indeed have been called a discussion, for it had carried them quite into the cold air of the abstract. Lady Barb had said she didn't see how Agatha could look at such a creature as that—an odious familiar vulgar being who had not about him the rudiments of a gentleman. Lady Agatha had replied that Mr. Longstraw was familiar and rough and that he had a twang and thought it amusing to talk to her as "the Princess"; but that he was a gentleman for all that and was tremendous fun whatever one called him—it didn't seem to matter what one called any one or anything there. Her sister had returned to this that if he was rough and familiar he couldn't be a gentleman, inasmuch as that was just what a gentleman meant—a man who was civil and well-bred and well-born. Lady Agatha had argued that such a point was just where she differed; that a man might perfectly be a gentleman and yet be rough, and even ignorant, so long as he was really nice. The only thing was that he should be really nice, which was the case with Mr.

Longstraw, who, moreover, was quite extraordinarily civil—as civil as a man could be. And then Lady Agatha herself made the strongest point she had ever made in her life (she had never been so inspired) in saying that Mr. Longstraw was rough perhaps, but not rude—a distinction altogether wasted on her sister, who declared that she hadn't come to America, of all places, to learn what a gentleman was. The discussion in short had been a trifle grim. I know not whether it was the tonic effect on them too, alien organisms as they were, of the fine winter weather, or that of Lady Barb's being bored and having nothing else to do ; but Lord Canterville's daughters went into the question with the moral earnestness of a pair of approved Bostonians. It was part of Lady Agatha's view of her admirer that he after all much resembled other tall people with smiling eyes and tawny moustaches who had ridden a good deal in rough countries and whom she had seen in other places. If he were more familiar he was also more alert ; still, the difference was not in himself, but in the way she saw him—the way she saw everybody in America. If she should see the others in the same way no doubt they'd be quite the same ; and Lady Agatha sighed a little over the possibilities of life ; for this peculiar way, especially regarded in connexion with gentlemen, had become very pleasant to her.

She had betrayed her sister more than she thought, even though Jackson didn't particularly show it in the tone in which he commented : " Of course she knows she's going to see your mother in the summer." His tone was rather that of irritation at so much harping on the very obvious.

" Oh, it isn't only mamma," the girl said.

" I know she likes a cool house," Mrs. Lemon contributed.

" When she goes you had better bid her good-bye," Lady Agatha went on.

" Of course I shall bid her good-bye," said Mrs. Lemon, to whom apparently this remark was addressed.

" I'll never bid *you* good-bye, Princess," Herman Longstraw interposed. " You can bet your life on that."

" Oh, it doesn't matter about me, for of course I shall come back ; but if Barb once gets to England she never will."

" Oh, my dear child !" Mrs. Lemon wailed, addressing her young visitor, but looking at her son, who on his side looked at the ceiling, at the floor, looked above all very conscious.

" I hope you don't mind my saying that, Jackson dear," Lady Agatha said to him, for she was very fond of her brother-in-law.

" Ah well then, she shan't go there," he threw off in a moment

with a small strange dry laugh that attached his mother's eyes in shy penetration to his face.

"But you promised mamma, you know," said the girl with the confidence of her affection.

Jackson's countenance expressed to her none even of his very moderate hilarity. "Your mother, then, must bring her back."

"Get some of your navy people to supply an ironclad!" cried Mr. Longstraw.

"It would be very pleasant if the Marchioness could come over," said Mrs. Lemon.

"Oh, she'd hate it more than poor Barb," Lady Agatha quickly replied. It didn't at all suit her to find a marchioness inserted into her field of vision.

"Doesn't she feel interested from what you've told her?" Lady Agatha's admirer inquired. But Jackson didn't heed his sister-in-law's answer—he was thinking of something else. He said nothing more, however, about the subject of his thought, and before ten minutes were over took his departure, having meanwhile neglected also to revert to the question of Lady Agatha's bringing her visit to his mother to a close. It wasn't to speak to him of this—for, as we know, she wished to keep the girl and somehow couldn't bring herself to be afraid of Herman Longstraw—that when her son took leave she went with him to the door of the house, detaining him a little while she stood on the steps, as people had always done in New York in her time, though it was another of the new fashions she didn't like, the stiffness of not coming out of the parlour. She placed her hand on his arm to keep him on the "stoop" and looked up and down into the lucid afternoon and the beautiful city—its chocolate-coloured houses so extraordinarily smooth—in which it seemed to her that even the most fastidious people ought to be glad to live. It was useless to attempt to conceal it: his marriage had made a difference and a worry, had put a barrier that she was yet under the painful obligation of trying to seem not to notice. It had brought with it a problem much more difficult than his old problem of how to make his mother feel herself still, as she had been in his childhood, the dispenser of his rewards. The old problem had been easily solved, the new was a great tax. Mrs. Lemon was sure her daughter-in-law didn't take her seriously, and that was a part of the barrier. Even if Barbarina liked her better than any one else, this mostly because she liked every one else so little. Mrs. Lemon had in her nature no grain of resentment, and it wasn't to feed a sense of wrong that she permitted herself to criticise her son's wife. She couldn't help.

feeling that his marriage wasn't altogether fortunate if his wife didn't take his mother seriously. She knew she wasn't otherwise remarkable than as being his mother ; but that position, which was no merit of hers—the merit was all Jackson's in being her son—affected her as one which, familiar as Lady Barb appeared to have been in England with positions of various kinds, would naturally strike the girl as very high and to be accepted as freely as a fine morning. If she didn't think of his mother as an indivisible part of him perhaps she didn't think of other things either ; and Mrs. Lemon vaguely felt that, remarkable as Jackson was, he was made up of parts, and that it would never do that these should be rated lower one by one, since there was no knowing what that might end in. She feared that things were rather cold for him at home when he had to explain so much to his wife—explain to her, for instance, all the sources of happiness that were to be found in New York. This struck her as a new kind of problem altogether for a husband. She had never thought of matrimony without a community of feeling in regard to religion and country ; one took those great conditions for granted just as one assumed that one's food was to be cooked ; and if Jackson should have to discuss them with his wife he might, in spite of his great abilities, be carried into regions where he would get entangled and embroiled—from which even possibly he wouldn't come back at all. Mrs. Lemon had a horror of losing him in some way, and this fear was in her eyes as she stood by the doorway of her house, and, after she had glanced up and down the street, eyed him a moment in silence. He simply kissed her again and said she would take cold.

"I'm not afraid of that—I've a shawl!" Mrs. Lemon, who was very small and very fair, with pointed features and an elaborate cap, passed her life in a shawl, and owed to this habit her reputation for being an invalid—an idea she scorned, naturally enough, inasmuch as it was precisely her shawl that, as she believed, kept every ill at bay. "Is it true Barbarina won't come back?" she then asked.

"I don't know that we shall ever find out ; I don't know that I shall take her to England," Jackson distinctly returned.

She looked more anxious still. "Didn't you promise, dear?"

"I don't know that I promised—not absolutely."

"But you wouldn't keep her here against her will?" quavered Mrs. Lemon.

"I guess she'll get used to it," he returned with a levity that misrepresented the state of his nerves.

Mrs. Lemon looked up and down the street again and gave a

LADY BARBARINA

little sigh. "What a pity she isn't American!" She didn't mean this as a reproach, a hint of what might have been; it was simply embarrassment resolved into speech.

"She couldn't have been American," said Jackson with decision.

"Couldn't she, dear?" His mother spoke with conscientious respect; she felt there were imperceptible reasons in this.

"It was just as she is that I wanted her," Jackson added.

"Even if she won't come back?" Mrs. Lemon went on with wonder.

"Oh, she has got to come back!" Jackson said as he went down the steps.

6

LADY BARB, after this, didn't decline to see her New York acquaintances on Sunday afternoons, though she refused for the present to enter into a project of her husband's, who thought it would be pleasant she should entertain his friends on the evening of that day. Like all good Americans, Doctor Lemon devoted much consideration to the great question of how, in his native land, society was to be brought into being. It seemed to him it would help on the good cause, for which so many Americans are ready to lay down their lives, if his wife should, as he jocularly called it, open a saloon. He believed, or tried to believe, the *salon* now possible in New York on condition of its being reserved entirely for adults; and in having taken a wife out of a country in which social traditions were rich and ancient he had done something toward qualifying his own house—so splendidly qualified in all strictly material respects—to be the scene of such an effort. A charming woman accustomed only to the best on each side, as Lady Beauchemin said, what mightn't she achieve by being at home—always to adults only—in an easy early inspiring comprehensive way and on the evening of the seven when worldly engagements were least numerous? He laid his philosophy before Lady Barb in pursuance of a theory that if she disliked New York on a short acquaintance she couldn't fail to like it on a long. Jackson believed in the New York mind—not so much indeed in its literary, artistic, philosophic or political achievements, as in its general quickness and nascent adaptability. He clung to this belief, for it was an indispensable neat block in the structure he was attempting to rear. The New York mind would throw its glamour over Lady Barb if she would only give it a chance; for it was thoroughly bright, responsive and sym-

pathetic. If she would only set up by the turn of her hand a blest snug social centre, a temple of interesting talk in which this charming organ might expand and where she might inhale its fragrance in the most convenient and luxurious way, without, as it were, getting up from her chair ; if she would only just try this graceful good-natured experiment—which would make every one like *her* so much too—he was sure all the wrinkles in the gilded scroll of his fate would be smoothed out. But Lady Barb didn't rise at all to his conception and hadn't the least curiosity about the New York mind. She thought it would be extremely disagreeable to have a lot of people tumbling in on Sunday evening without being invited ; and altogether her husband's sketch of the Anglo-American saloon seemed to her to suggest crude familiarity, high vociferation—she had already made a remark to him about “screeching women”—and random extravagant laughter. She didn't tell him—for this somehow it wasn't in her power to express, and, strangely enough, he never completely guessed it—that she was singularly deficient in any natural or indeed acquired understanding of what a saloon might be. She had never seen or dreamed of one—and for the most part was incapable of imagining a thing she hadn't seen. She had seen great dinners and balls and meets and runs and races ; she had seen garden-parties and bunches of people, mainly women—who, however, didn't screech—at dull stuffy teas, and distinguished companies collected in splendid castles ; but all this gave her no clue to a train of conversation, to any idea of a social agreement that the interest of talk, its continuity, its accumulations from season to season, shouldn't be lost. Conversation, in Lady Barb's experience, had never been continuous ; in such a case it would surely have been a bore. It had been occasional and fragmentary, a trifle jerky, with allusions that were never explained ; it had a dread of detail—it seldom pursued anything very far or kept hold of it very long.

There was something else she didn't say to her husband in reference to his visions of hospitality, which was that if she should open a saloon—she had taken up the joke as well, for Lady Barb was eminently good-natured—Mrs. Vanderdecken would straightway open another, and Mrs. Vanderdecken's would be the more successful of the two. This lady, for reasons Lady Barb had not yet explored, passed for the great personage of New York ; there were legends of her husband's family having behind them a fabulous antiquity. When this was alluded to it was spoken of as something incalculable and lost in the dimness of time. Mrs. Vanderdecken was young, pretty, clever, incredibly pretentious,

LADY BARBARINA

Lady Barb thought, and had a wonderfully artistic house. Ambition was expressed, further, in every rustle of her garments ; and if she was the first lady in America, "bar none"—this had an immense sound—it was plain she intended to retain the character. It was not till after she had been several months in New York that Lady Barb began to perceive this easy mistress of the field, crying out, gracious goodness, before she was hurt, to have flung down the glove ; and when the idea presented itself, lighted up by an incident I have no space to report, she simply blushed a little (for Mrs. Vanderdecken) and held her tongue. She hadn't come to America to bandy words about "precedence" with such a woman as that. She had ceased to think of that convenience—of course one was obliged to think in England ; though an instinct of self-preservation, old and deep-seated, led her not to expose herself to occasions on which her imputed claim might be tested. This had at bottom much to do with her having, very soon after the first flush of the honours paid her on her arrival and which seemed to her rather grossly overdone, taken the line of scarcely going out. "They can't keep *that* up !" she had said to herself ; and in short she would stay, less boringly both for herself and for others, at home. She had a sense that whenever and wherever she might go forth she should meet Mrs. Vanderdecken, who would withhold or deny or contest or even magnanimously concede something—poor Lady Barb could never imagine what. She didn't try to, and gave little thought to all this ; for she wasn't prone to confess to herself fears, especially fears from which terror was absent. What in the world *had* Mrs. Vanderdecken that she, Barbarina Lemon (what a name !), could want ? But as I have said, it abode within her as a presentiment that if she should set up a drawing-room in the foreign style (based, that is, on the suppression of prattling chits and hobbledehoes) this sharp skirmisher would be beforehand with her. The continuity of conversation, oh that she would certainly go in for—there was no one so continuous as Mrs. Vanderdecken. Lady Barb, as I have related, didn't give her husband the surprise of confiding to him these thoughts, though she had given him some other surprises. He would have been decidedly astonished, and perhaps after a bit a little encouraged, at finding her liable to any marked form of exasperation.

On the Sunday afternoon she was visible ; and at one of these junctures, going into her drawing-room late, he found her entertaining two ladies and a gentleman. The gentleman was Sidney Feeder and one of the ladies none other than Mrs. Vanderdecken, whose ostensible relations with her were indeed of the

most cordial nature. Intending utterly to crush her—as two or three persons, not perhaps conspicuous for a narrow accuracy, gave out that she privately declared—Mrs. Vanderdecken yet wished at least to study the weak points of the invader, to penetrate herself with the character of the English girl. Lady Barb verily appeared to have for the representative of the American patriciate a mysterious fascination. Mrs. Vanderdecken couldn't take her eyes off her victim and, whatever might be her estimate of her importance, at least couldn't let her alone. "Why does she come to see me?" poor Lady Barb asked herself. "I'm sure I don't want to see her; she has done enough for civility long ago." Mrs. Vanderdecken had her own reasons, one of which was simply the pleasure of looking at the Doctor's wife, as she habitually called the daughter of the Cantervilles. She wasn't guilty of the rashness of depreciating the appearance of so markedly fine a young woman, but professed a positive unbounded admiration for it, defending it on many occasions against those of the superficial and stupid who pronounced her "left nowhere" by the best of the home-grown specimens. Whatever might have been Lady Barb's weak points, they included neither the curve of her cheek and chin, the setting of her head on her throat, nor the quietness of her deep eyes, which were as beautiful as if they had been blank, like those of antique busts. "The head's enchanting—perfectly enchanting," Mrs. Vanderdecken used to say irrelevantly and as if there were only one head in the place. She always used to ask about the Doctor—which was precisely another reason why she came. She dragged in the Doctor at every turn, asking if he were often called up at night; found it the greatest of luxuries, in a word, to address Lady Barb as the wife of a medical man as more or less *au courant* of her husband's patients. The other lady, on this Sunday afternoon, was a certain little Mrs. Chew, who had the appearance of a small but very expensive doll and was always asking Lady Barb about England, which Mrs. Vanderdecken never did. The latter discoursed on a purely American basis and with that continuity of which mention has already been made, while Mrs. Chew engaged Sidney Feeder on topics equally local. Lady Barb liked Sidney Feeder; she only hated his name, which was constantly in her ears during the half-hour the ladies sat with her, Mrs. Chew having, like so many persons in New York, the habit, which greatly annoyed her, of re-apostrophising and re-designating every one present.

Lady Barb's relations with Mrs. Vanderdecken consisted mainly in wondering, while she talked, what she wanted of her, and in looking, with her sculptured eyes, at her visitor's clothes, in which

there was always much to examine. "Oh, Doctor Feeder!" "Now Doctor Feeder!" "Well, Doctor Feeder!"—these exclamations, on Mrs. Chew's lips, were an undertone in Lady Barb's consciousness. When we say she liked her husband's confrère, as he never failed to describe himself, we understand that she smiled on his appearance and gave him her hand, and asked him if he would have tea. There was nothing nasty, as they so analytically said in London, about Lady Barb, and she would have been incapable of inflicting a deliberate snub on a man who had the air of standing up so squarely to any purpose he might have in hand. But she had nothing of her own at all to say to Sidney Feeder. He apparently had the art of making her shy, more shy than usual—since she was always a little so; she discouraged him, discouraged him completely and reduced him to naught. He wasn't a man who wanted drawing out, there was nothing of that in him, he was remarkably copious; but she seemed unable to follow him in any direction and half the time evidently didn't know what he was saying. He tried to adapt his conversation to her needs; but when he spoke of the world, of what was going on in society, she was more at sea even than when he spoke of hospitals and laboratories and the health of the city and the progress of science. She appeared indeed after her first smile when he came in, which was always charming, scarcely to see him—looking past him and above him and below him, everywhere but at him, till he rose to go again, when she gave him another smile, as expressive of pleasure and of casual acquaintance as that with which she had greeted his entry; it seemed to imply that they had been having delightful communion. He wondered what the deuce Jackson Lemon could find interesting in such a woman, and he believed his perverse, though gifted, colleague not destined to feel her in the long run enriched or illuminate his life. He pitied Jackson, he saw that Lady Barb, in New York, would neither assimilate nor be assimilated; and yet he was afraid, for very compassion, to betray to the poor man how the queer step he had taken—now so dreadfully irrevocable—might be going to strike most others. Sidney Feeder was a man of a strenuous conscience, who did loyal duty overmuch and from the very fear he mightn't do it enough. In order not to appear to he called upon Lady Barb heroically, in spite of pressing engagements and week after week, enjoying his virtue himself as little as he made it fruitful for his hostess, who wondered at last what she had done to deserve this extremity of appreciation.

She spoke of it to her husband, who wondered also what poor Sidney had in his head and yet naturally shrank from damping

too brutally his zeal. Between the latter's wish not to let Jackson see his marriage had made a difference and Jackson's hesitation to reveal to him that his standard of friendship was too high, Lady Barb passed a good many of those numerous hours during which she asked herself if they were the "sort of thing" she had come to America for. Very little had ever passed between her and her husband on the subject of the most regular of her bores, a clear instinct warning her that if they were ever to have scenes she must choose the occasion well, and this odd person not being an occasion. Jackson had tacitly admitted that his "*confrère*" was anything she chose to think him; he was not a man to be guilty in a discussion of the disloyalty of damning a real friend with praise that was faint. If Lady Agatha had been less of an absentee from her sister's fireside, meanwhile, Doctor Feeder would have been better entertained; for the younger of the English pair prided herself, after several months of New York, on understanding everything that was said, on interpreting every sound, no matter from what lips the monstrous mystery fell. But Lady Agatha was never at home; she had learned to describe herself perfectly by the time she wrote her mother that she was always on the go. None of the innumerable victims of old-world tyranny welcomed to the land of freedom had yet offered more lavish incense to that goddess than this emancipated London débutante. She had enrolled herself in an amiable band known by the humorous name of "the Tearers"—a dozen young ladies of agreeable appearance, high spirits and good wind, whose most general characteristic was that, when wanted, they were to be sought anywhere in the world but under the roof supposed to shelter them. They browsed far from the fold; and when Sidney Feeder, as sometimes happened, met Lady Agatha at other houses, she was in the hands of the irrepressible Longstraw. She had come back to her sister, but Mr. Longstraw had followed her to the door. As to passing it, he had received direct discouragement from her brother-in-law; but he could at least hang about and wait for her. It may be confided to the reader, at the risk of discounting the effect of the only passage in this very level narrative formed to startle, that he never had to wait very long.

When Jackson Lemon came in his wife's visitors were on the point of leaving her; and he didn't even ask his colleague to remain, for he had something particular to say to Lady Barb.

"I haven't put to you half the questions I wanted—I've been talking so much to Doctor Feeder," the dressy Mrs. Chew said, holding the hand of her hostess in one of her own and toying at one of Lady Barb's ribbons with the other.

LADY BARBARINA

"I don't think I've anything to tell you ; I think I've told people everything," Lady Barb answered rather wearily.

"You haven't told *me* much!" Mrs. Vanderdecken richly radiated.

"What could one tell you? You know everything," Jackson impatiently laughed.

"Ah, no—there are some things that are great mysteries for me!" this visitor promptly pronounced. "I hope you're coming to me on the seventeenth?" she added to Lady Barb.

"On the seventeenth? I believe we go somewhere."

"Do go to Mrs. Vanderdecken's," said Mrs. Chew ; "you'll see the cream of cream."

"Oh, gracious!" Mrs. Vanderdecken vaguely cried.

"Well, I don't care ; she will, won't she, Doctor Feeder?—the very pick of American society." Mrs. Chew stuck to her point.

"Oh, I've no doubt Lady Barb will have a good time," said Sidney Feeder. "I'm afraid you miss the bran," he went on with irrelevant jocosity to Jackson's bride. He always tried the jocose when other elements had failed.

"The bran?" Jackson's bride couldn't think.

"Where you used to ride—in the Park."

"My dear fellow, you speak as if we had met at the circus," her husband interposed. "I haven't married a mountebank!"

"Well, they put some stuff on the road," Sidney Feeder explained, not holding much to his joke.

"You must miss a great many things," said Mrs. Chew tenderly.

"I don't see what," Mrs. Vanderdecken tinkled, "except the fogs and the Queen. New York's getting more and more like London. It's a pity—you ought to have known us thirty years ago."

"You're the queen here," said Jackson Lemon "but I don't know what you know about thirty years ago."

"Do you think she doesn't go back?—she goes back to the last century!" cried Mrs. Chew.

"I daresay I should have liked that," said Lady Barb ; "but I can't imagine." And she looked at her husband—a look she often had—as if she vaguely wished him to do something.

He was not called upon, however, to take any violent steps, for Mrs. Chew presently said, "Well, Lady Barb, good-bye" ; Mrs. Vanderdecken glared genially and as for excess of meaning at her hostess and addressed a farewell, accompanied very audibly with his title, to her host ; and Sidney Feeder made a joke about stepping on the trains of the ladies' dresses as he accompanied them to the door. Mrs. Chew had always a great deal to say at the

last ; she talked till she was in the street and then she addressed that prospect. But at the end of five minutes Jackson Lemon was alone with his wife, to whom he then announced a piece of news. He prefaced it, however, by an inquiry as he came back from the hall.

"Where's Agatha, my dear?"

"I haven't the least idea. In the streets somewhere, I suppose."

"I think you ought to know a little more."

"How can I know about things here? I've given her up. I can do nothing with her. I don't care what she does."

"She ought to go back to England," Jackson said after a pause.

"She ought never to have come."

"It was not my proposal, God knows!" he sharply returned.

"Mamma could never know what it really is," his wife more quietly noted.

"No, it hasn't been as yet what your mother supposed! The man Longstraw wants to marry her and has made a formal proposal. I met him half an hour ago in Madison Avenue, and he asked me to come with him into the Columbia Club. There, in the billiard-room, which to-day is empty, he opened himself—thinking evidently that in laying the matter before me he was behaving with extraordinary propriety. He tells me he's dying of love and that she's perfectly willing to go and live in Arizona."

"So she is," said Lady Barb. "And what did you tell him?"

"I told him I was convinced it would never do and that at any rate I could have nothing to say to it. I told him explicitly in short what I had told him virtually before. I said we should send Aggie straight back to England, and that if they had the courage they must themselves broach the question over there."

"When shall you send her back?" asked Lady Barb.

"Immediately—by the very first steamer."

"Alone, like an American girl?"

"Don't be rough, Barb," Jackson replied. "I shall easily find some people—lots of them are sailing now."

"I must take her myself," Lady Barb observed in a moment. "I brought her out—so I must restore her to my mother's hands."

He had expected this and believed he was prepared for it, but when it came he found his preparation not complete. He had no answer to make—none at least that seemed to him to go to the point. During these last weeks it had come over him with quiet irresistible unmerciful force that Mrs. Dexter Freer had been right in saying to him that Sunday afternoon in Jermyn Street, the summer before, that he would find it wasn't so simple to be an American. Such a character was complicated, in just the measure

that she had foretold, by the difficulty of domesticating any wife at all liberally chosen. The difficulty wasn't dissipated by his having taken a high tone about it ; it pinched him from morning till night, it hurt him like a misfitting shoe. His high tone had given him courage when he took the great step ; but he began to perceive that the highest tone in the world couldn't change the nature of things. His ears tingled as he inwardly noted that if the Dexter Freers, whom he had thought alike abject in their hopes and their fears, had been by ill luck spending the winter in New York, they would have found his predicament as good fun as they could wish. Drop by drop the conviction had entered his mind—the first drop had come in the form of a word from Lady Agatha—that if his wife should return to England she would never again later recross the Atlantic. That word from the competent source had been the touch from the outside at which often a man's fear crystallises. What she would do, how she would resist—this he wasn't yet prepared to tell himself ; but he felt every time he looked at her that the beautiful woman he had adored was filled with a dumb insuperable ineradicable purpose. He knew that if she should plant herself firm no power on earth would move her ; and her blooming antique beauty and the general loftiness of her breeding came fast to seem to him but the magnificent expression of a dense, patient, ponderous power to resist. She wasn't light, she wasn't supple, and after six months of marriage he had made up his mind that she wasn't intelligent—in spite of all which she would elude him. She had married him, she had come into his fortune and his consideration—for who was she after all ? he was on occasion so angry as to ask himself, remembering that in England Lady Claras and Lady Florences were as thick as blackberries—but she would have nothing to do, if she could help it, with his country. She had gone into dinner first in every house in the place, but this hadn't satisfied her. It *had* been simple to be an American in the good and easy sense that no one else in New York had made any difficulties ; the difficulties had sprung from the very, the consummate, make of her, which were after all what he had married her for, thinking they would be a fine temperamental heritage for his brood. So they would, doubtless, in the coming years and after the brood should have appeared ; but meanwhile they interfered with the best heritage of all—the nationality of his possible children. She would do indeed nothing violent ; he was tolerably certain of that. She wouldn't return to England without his consent ; only when she should return it would be once for all. His one possible line, then, was not to take her back—a position replete with difficulties, since he had

in a manner given his word ; she herself giving none at all beyond the formal promise murmured at the altar. She had been general, but he had been specific ; the settlements he had made were a part of that. His difficulties were such as he couldn't directly face. He must tack in approaching so uncertain a coast. He said to his wife presently that it would be very inconvenient for him to leave New York at that moment : she must remember their plans had been laid for a later move. He couldn't think of letting her make the voyage without him, and on the other hand they must pack her sister off without delay. He would therefore make instant inquiry for a chaperon, and he relieved his irritation by cursing the name and every other attribute of Herman Longstraw.

Lady Barb didn't trouble herself to denounce this gentleman ; her manner was that of having for a long time expected the worst. She simply remarked after having listened to her husband for some minutes in silence : " I'd quite as lief she should marry Doctor Feeder ! "

The day after this he closeted himself for an hour with his sister-in-law, taking great pains to set forth to her the reasons why she shouldn't marry her Californian. Jackson was kind, he was affectionate ; he kissed her and put his arm round her waist, he reminded her that he and she were the best of friends and that she had always been awfully nice to him ; therefore he counted on her. She'd break her mother's heart, she'd deserve her father's curse, and she'd get him, Jackson, into a pickle from which no human power might ever disembroil him. Lady Agatha listened and cried, she returned his kiss very affectionately and admitted that her father and mother would never consent to such a marriage and when he told her that he had made arrangements that she should sail for Liverpool, with some charming people, the next day but one, she embraced him again and assured him she could never thank him enough for all the trouble he had taken about her. He flattered himself he had convinced and in some degree comforted her, and he reflected with complacency that even should his wife take it into her head Barb would never get ready to embark for her native land between a Monday and a Wednesday. The next morning Lady Agatha failed to appear at breakfast, though as she usually rose very late her absence excited no immediate alarm. She hadn't rung her bell and was supposed still to be sleeping. But she had never yet slept later than mid-day ; and as this hour approached her sister went to her room. Lady Barb then discovered that she had left the house at seven o'clock in the morning and had gone to meet Mr. Longstraw at a neighbouring corner. A little note on the table explained it very

succinctly, and put beyond the power of the Jackson Lemons to doubt that by the time this news reached them their wayward sister had been united to the man of her preference as closely as the laws of the State of New York could bind her. Her little note set forth that as she knew she should never be permitted to marry him she had resolved to marry him without permission, and that directly after the ceremony, which would be of the simplest kind, they were to take a train for the Far West.

Our record is concerned only with the remote consequences of this affair, which made of course a great deal of trouble for poor Jackson. He pursued the fugitives to remote rocky fastnesses and finally overtook them in California ; but he hadn't the boldness to propose to them to separate, for he promptly made out that Herman Longstraw was at least as well married as himself. Lady Agatha was already popular in the new States, where the history of her elopement, emblazoned in enormous capitals, was circulated in a thousand newspapers. This question of the newspapers had been for our troubled friend one of the most definite results of his sister-in-law's *coup de tête*. His first thought had been of the public prints and his first exclamation a prayer that they shouldn't get hold of the story. They had, however, got hold of it with a myriad wildly-waved hands and were scattering it broadcast over the world. Lady Barb never caught them in the act—she succeeded perfectly in not seeing what she needn't ; but an affectionate friend of the family, travelling at that time in the United States, made a parcel of some of the leading journals, and sent them to Lord Canterville. This missive elicited from her ladyship a letter, addressed to her son-in-law, which shook the young man's position to the base. The phials of a rank vulgarity had been opened on the house of Canterville, and the noble matron demanded that in compensation for the affronts and injuries heaped upon her family, and bereaved and dishonoured as she was, she should at least be allowed to look on the face of her second daughter. " I suppose you'll not, for very pity, be deaf to such a prayer as that," said Lady Barb ; and though loth to record a second act of weakness on the part of a man with pretensions to be strong, I may not disguise the fact that poor Jackson, who blushed dreadfully over the newspapers and felt afresh as he read them the force of Mrs. Freer's terrible axiom, poor Jackson paid a visit to the office of the Cunarders. He said to himself later on that it was the newspapers that had done it ; he couldn't decently appear to be on their side : they made it so hard to deny that the country was impossible at a time when one was in need of all one's arguments. Lady Barb, before sailing,

definitely refused to mention any week or month as the date of their prearranged return to New York. Very many weeks and months have elapsed since then, and she gives no sign of coming back. She will never fix a date. She is much missed by Mrs. Vanderdecken, who still alludes to her—still says the line of the shoulders was superb ; putting the statement pensively in the past tense. Lady Beauchemin and Lady Marmaduke are much disconcerted ; the international project has not, in their view, received an impetus.

Jackson Lemon has a house in London and he rides in the Park with his wife, who is as beautiful as the day and who a year ago presented him with a little girl exhibiting features that he already scans for the look of race—whether in hope or in fear to-day is more than my muse has revealed. He has occasional scenes with Lady Barb during which the look of race is very clear in her own countenance ; but they never terminate in a visit to the Cunarders. He's exceedingly restless and is constantly crossing to the Continent ; but he returns with a certain abruptness, for he hates meeting the Dexter Freers, who seem to pervade the more comfortable parts of Europe. He dodges them in every town. Sidney Feeder feels very badly about him ; it's months since Jackson has sent him any "results." The excellent fellow goes very often, in a consolatory spirit, to see Mrs. Lemon, but has not yet been able to answer her standing question—"Why that girl more than another ?" Lady Agatha Longstraw and her husband arrived a year ago in England, and Mr. Longstraw's personality had immense success during the last London season. It's not exactly known what they live on, though perfectly known that he's looking for something to do. Meanwhile it's as good as known that their really quite responsible brother-in-law supports them.

THE ASPERN PAPERS

I

I HAD taken Mrs. Prest into my confidence ; without her in truth I should have made but little advance, for the fruitful idea in the whole business dropped from her friendly lips. It was she who found the short cut and loosed the Gordian knot. It is not supposed easy for women to rise to the large free view of anything, anything to be done ; but they sometimes throw off a bold conception—such as a man wouldn't have risen to—with singular serenity. “Simply make them take you in on the footing of a lodger”—I don't think that unaided I should have risen to that. I was beating about the bush, trying to be ingenious, wondering by what combination of arts I might become an acquaintance, when she offered this happy suggestion that the way to become an acquaintance was first to become an intimate. Her actual knowledge of the Misses Bordereau was scarcely larger than mine, and indeed, I had brought with me from England some definite facts that were new to her. Their name had been mixed up ages before with one of the greatest names of the century, and they now lived obscurely in Venice, lived on very small means, unvisited, unapproachable, in a sequestered and dilapidated old palace : this was the substance of my friend's impression of them. She herself had been established in Venice some fifteen years and had done a great deal of good there ; but the circle of her benevolence had never embraced the two shy, mysterious and, as was somehow supposed, scarcely respectable Americans—they were believed to have lost in their long exile all national quality, besides being as their name implied of some remoter French affiliation—who asked no favours and desired no attention. In the early years of her residence she had made an attempt to see them, but this had been successful only as regards the little one, as Mrs. Prest called the niece ; though in fact I afterwards found her the bigger of the two in inches. She had heard Miss Bordereau was ill and had a suspicion she was in want, and had gone to the house to offer aid, so that if there were suffering, American suffering in particular, she shouldn't have it on her conscience. The “little one” had received her in the great cold tarnished Venetian *sala*, the central hall of the house, paved with marble and roofed with dim cross-beams, and hadn't even asked her to sit down. This

was not encouraging for me, who wished to sit so fast, and I remarked as much to Mrs. Prest. She replied, however, with profundity : " Ah, but there's all the difference : I went to confer a favour and you'll go to ask one. If they're proud you'll be on the right side." And she offered to show me their house to begin with—to row me thither in her gondola. I let her know I had already been to look at it half a dozen times ; but I accepted her invitation, for it charmed me to hover about the place. I had made my way to it the day after my arrival in Venice—it had been described to me in advance by the friend in England to whom I owed definite information as to their possession of the papers—laying siege to it with my eyes while I considered my plan of campaign. Jeffrey Aspern had never been in it that I knew of, but some note of his voice seemed to abide there by a roundabout implication and in a " dying fall."

Mrs. Prest knew nothing about the papers, but was interested in my curiosity, as always in the joys and sorrows of her friends. As we went, however, in her gondola, gliding there under the sociable hood with the bright Venetian picture framed on either side by the movable window, I saw how my eagerness amused her and that she found my interest in my possible spoil a fine case of monomania. " One would think you expected from it the answer to the riddle of the universe," she said ; and I denied the impeachment only by replying that if I had to choose between that precious solution and a bundle of Jeffrey Aspern's letters I knew, indeed, which would appear to me the greater boon. She pretended to make light of his genius and I took no pains to defend him. One doesn't defend one's god : one's god is in himself a defence. Besides, to-day, after his long comparative obscurity, he hangs high in the heaven of our literature for all the world to see ; he's a part of the light by which we walk. The most I said was that he was no doubt not a woman's poet ; to which she rejoined aptly enough that he had been at least Miss Bordereau's. The strange thing had been for me to discover in England that she was still alive : it was as if I had been told Mrs. Siddons was, or Queen Caroline, or the famous Lady Hamilton, for it seemed to me that she belonged to a generation as extinct. " Why, she must be tremendously old—at least a hundred," I had said ; but on coming to consider dates I saw it not strictly involved that she should have far exceeded the common span. None the less she was of venerable age and her relations with Jeffrey Aspern had occurred in her early womanhood. " That's her excuse," said Mrs. Prest half sententiously and yet also somewhat as if she were ashamed of making a speech so little in the

real tone of Venice. As if a woman needed an excuse for having loved the divine poet ! He had been not only one of the most brilliant minds of his day—and in those years, when the century was young, there were, as every one knows, many—but one of the most genial men and one of the handsomest.

The niece, according to Mrs. Prest, was of minor antiquity, and the conjecture was risked that she was only a grand-niece. This was possible ; I had nothing but my share in the very limited knowledge of my English fellow-worshipper John Cumnor, who had never seen the couple. The world, as I say, had recognised Jeffrey Aspern, but Cumnor and I had recognised him most. The multitude to-day flocked to his temple, but of that temple he and I regarded ourselves as the appointed ministers. We held, justly, as I think, that we had done more for his memory than any one else, and had done it simply by opening lights into his life. He had nothing to fear from us because he had nothing to fear from the truth, which alone at such a distance of time we could be interested in establishing. His early death had been the only dark spot, as it were, on his fame, unless the papers in Miss Bordereau's hands should perversely bring out others. There had been an impression about 1825 that he had "treated her badly," just as there had been an impression that he had "served," as the London populace says, several other ladies in the same masterful way. Each of these cases Cumnor and I had been able to investigate, and we had never failed to acquit him conscientiously of any grossness. I judged him perhaps more indulgently than my friend ; certainly, at any rate, it appeared to me that no man could have walked straighter in the given circumstances. These had been almost always difficult and dangerous. Half the women of his time, to speak liberally, had flung themselves at his head, and while the fury raged—the more that it was very catching—accidents, some of them grave, had not failed to occur. He was not a woman's poet, as I had said to Mrs. Prest, in the modern phase of his reputation ; but the situation had been different when the man's own voice was mingled with his song. That voice, by every testimony, was one of the most charming ever heard. "Orpheus and the Maenads !" had been of course my foreseen judgment when first I turned over his correspondence. Almost all the Maenads were unreasonably and many of them unbearable. It struck me that he had been kinder and more considerate than in his place—if I could imagine myself in any such box—I should have found the trick of.

It was certainly strange beyond all strangeness, and I shall not take up space with attempting to explain it, that whereas among

all these other relations and in these other directions of research we had to deal with phantoms and dust, the mere echoes, the one living source of information that had lingered on into our time had been unheeded by us. Every one of Aspern's contemporaries had, according to our belief, passed away ; we had not been able to look into a single pair of eyes into which his had looked or to feel a transmitted contact in any aged hand that his hand had touched. Most dead of all did poor Miss Bordereau appear, and yet she alone had survived. We exhausted in the course of months our wonder that we had not found her out sooner, and the substance of our explanation was that she had kept so quiet. The poor lady on the whole had had reason for doing so. But it was a revelation to us that self-effacement on such a scale had been possible in the latter half of the nineteenth century—the age of newspapers and telegrams and photographs and interviewers. She had taken no great trouble for it either—hadn't hidden herself away in an undiscovered hole, had boldly settled down in a city of exhibition. The one apparent secret of her safety had been that Venice contained so many much greater curiosities. And then accident had somehow favoured her, as was shown for example in the fact that Mrs. Prest had never happened to name her to me, though I had spent three weeks in Venice—under her nose as it were—five years before. My friend, indeed, had not named her much to any one ; she appeared almost to have forgotten the fact of her continuance. Of course Mrs. Prest hadn't the nerves of an editor. It was meanwhile no explanation of the old woman's having eluded us to say that she lived abroad, for our researches had again and again taken us—not only by correspondence but by personal inquiry—to France, to Germany, to Italy, in which countries, not counting his important stay in England, so many of the too few years of Aspern's career had been spent. We were glad to think at least that in all our promulgations—some people now consider I believe that we have overdone them—we had only touched in passing and in the most discreet manner on Miss Bordereau's connection. Oddly enough, even if we had had the material—and we had often wondered what could have become of it—this would have been the most difficult episode to handle.

The gondola stopped, the old palace was there ; it was a house of the class which in Venice carries even in extreme dilapidation the dignified name. "How charming ! It's grey and pink !" my companions exclaimed ; and that is the most comprehensive description of it. It was not particularly old, only two or three centuries ; and it had an air not so much of decay as of quiet

discouragement, as if it had rather missed its career. But its wide front, with a stone balcony from end to end of the *piano nobile* or most important floor, was architectural enough, with the aid of various pilasters and arches ; and the stucco with which in the intervals it had long ago been endued was rosy in the April afternoon. It overlooked a clean, melancholy, rather lonely canal, which had a narrow *riva* or convenient footway on either side. " I don't know why—there are no brick gables," said Mrs. Prest, " but this corner has seemed to me before more Dutch than Italian, more like Amsterdam than like Venice. It's eccentrically neat, for reasons of its own ; and though you may pass on foot scarcely any one ever thinks of doing so. It's as negative—considering *where* it is—as a Protestant Sunday. Perhaps the people are afraid of the Misses Bordereau. I dare say they have the reputation of witches."

I forget what answer I made to this—I was given up to two other reflections. The first of these was that if the old lady lived in such a big and imposing house she couldn't be in any sort of misery and, therefore, wouldn't be tempted by a chance to let a couple of rooms. I expressed this fear to Mrs. Prest, who gave me a very straight answer. " If she didn't live in a big house how could it be a question of her having rooms to spare ? If she were not amply lodged you'd lack ground to approach her. Besides, a big house here, and especially in this *quartier perdu*, proves nothing at all : it's perfectly consistent with a state of penury. Dilapidated old *palazzi*, if you'll go out of the way for them, are to be had for five shillings a year. And as for the people who live in them—no, until you've explored Venice socially as much as I have, you can form no idea of their domestic desolation. They live on nothing, for they've nothing to live on." The other idea that had come into my head was connected with a high blank wall which appeared to confine an expanse of ground on one side of the house. Blank I call it, but it was figured over with the patches that please a painter, repaired breaches, crumbings of plaster, extrusions of brick that had turned pink with time ; while a few thin trees, with the poles of certain rickety trellises, were visible over the top. The place was a garden and apparently attached to the house. I suddenly felt that so attached it gave me my pretext.

I sat looking out on all this with Mrs. Prest (it was covered with the golden glow of Venice) from the shade of our *felze*, and she asked me if I would go in then, while she waited for me, or come back another time. At first I couldn't decide—it was doubtless very weak of me. I wanted still to think I *might* get a

footing, and was afraid to meet failure, for it would leave me, as I remarked to my companion, without another arrow for my bow. "Why not another?" she inquired as I sat there hesitating and thinking it over; and she wished to know why even now and before taking the trouble of becoming an inmate—which might be wretchedly uncomfortable after all, even if it succeeded—I hadn't the resource of simply offering them a sum of money down. In that way I might get what I wanted without bad nights.

"Dearest lady," I exclaimed, "excuse the impatience of my tone when I suggest that you must have forgotten the very fact—surely I communicated it to you—which threw me on your ingenuity. The old woman won't have her relics and tokens so much as spoken of; they're personal, delicate, intimate, and she hasn't the feelings of the day, God bless her! If I should sound that note first I should certainly spoil the game. I can arrive at my spoils only by putting her off her guard, and I can put her off her guard only by ingratiating diplomatic arts. Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I'm sorry for it, but there's no baseness I wouldn't commit for Jeffrey Aspern's sake. First I must take tea with her—then tackle the main job." And I told over what had happened to John Cumnor on his respectfully writing to her. No notice whatever had been taken of his first letter, and the second had been answered very sharply, in six lines, by the niece. "Miss Bordereau requested her to say that she couldn't imagine what he meant by troubling them. They had none of Mr. Aspern's 'literary remains,' and if they *had* had wouldn't have dreamed of showing them to any one on any account whatever. She couldn't imagine what he was talking about and begged he would let her alone." I certainly didn't want to be met that way.

"Well," said Mrs. Prest after a moment and all provokingly, "perhaps they really haven't anything. If they deny it flat how are you sure?"

"John Cumnor's sure, and it would take me long to tell you how his conviction, or his very strong presumption—strong enough to stand against the old lady's not unnatural fib—has built itself up. Besides, he makes much of the internal evidence of the niece's letter."

"The internal evidence?"

"Her calling him 'Mr. Aspern.'"

"I don't see what that proves."

"It proves familiarity, and familiarity implies the possession of mementoes, of tangible objects. I can't tell you how that

'Mr.' affects me—how it bridges over the gulf of time and brings our hero near to me—nor what an edge it gives to my desire to see Juliana. You don't say 'Mr.' Shakespeare."

"Would I, any more, if I had a box full of his letters?"

"Yes, if he had been your lover and someone wanted them!" And I added that John Cumnor was so convinced, and so all the more convinced by Miss Bordereau's tone, that he would have come himself to Venice on the undertaking were it not for the obstacle of his having, for any confidence, to disprove his identity with the person who had written to them, which the old ladies would be sure to suspect in spite of dissimulation and a change of name. If they were to ask him point-blank if he were not their snubbed correspondent it would be too awkward for him to lie; whereas I was fortunately not tied in that way. I was a fresh hand—I could protest without lying.

"But you'll have to take a false name," said Mrs. Prest. "Juliana lives out of the world as much as it is possible to live, but she has none the less probably heard of Mr. Aspern's editors. She perhaps possesses what you've published."

"I've thought of that," I returned; and I drew out of my pocket-book a visiting card neatly engraved with a well-chosen *nom de guerre*.

"You're very extravagant—it adds to your immorality. You might have done it in pencil or ink," said my companion.

"This looks more genuine."

"Certainly you've the courage of your curiosity. But it will be awkward about your letters; they won't come to you in that mask."

"My banker will take them in and I shall go every day to get them. It will give me a little walk."

"Shall you depend all on that?" asked Mrs. Prest. "Aren't you coming to see me?"

"Oh, you'll have left Venice for the hot months long before there are any results. I'm prepared to roast all summer—as well as through the long hereafter perhaps you'll say! Meanwhile John Cumnor will bombard me with letters addressed, in my feigned name, to the care of the *padrona*."

"She'll recognise his hand," my companion suggested.

"On the envelope he can disguise it."

"Well, you're a precious pair! Doesn't it occur to you that even if you're able to say you're not Mr. Cumnor in person they may still suspect you of being his emissary?"

"Certainly, and I see only one way to parry that."

"And what may that be?"

I hesitated for a moment. "To make love to the niece."
 "Ah," cried my friend, "wait till you see her!"

2

"I MUST work the garden—I must work the garden," I said to myself five minutes later and while I waited, upstairs, in the long, dusky *sala*, where the bare scagliola floor gleamed vaguely in a chink of the closed shutters. The place was impressive, yet looked somehow cold and cautious. Mrs. Prest had floated away, giving me a rendezvous at the end of half an hour by some neighbouring watersteps; and I had been let into the house, after pulling the rusty bell-wire, by a small red-headed and white-faced maid-servant, who was very young and not ugly and wore clicking pattens and a shawl in the fashion of a hood. She had not contented herself with opening the door from above by the usual arrangement of a creaking pulley, though she had looked down at me first from an upper window, dropping the cautious challenge which in Italy precedes the act of admission. I was so irritated as a general thing by this survival of medieval manners, though as so fond, if yet so special, an antiquarian I suppose I ought to have liked it; but, with my resolve to be genial from the threshold at any price, I took my false card out of my pocket and held it up to her smiling as if it were a magic token. It had the effect of one indeed, for it brought her, as I say, all the way down. I begged her to hand it to her mistress, having first written on it in Italian the words: "Could you very kindly see a gentleman, a travelling American, for a moment?" The little maid wasn't hostile—even that was perhaps something gained. She coloured, she smiled, and looked both frightened and pleased. I could see that my arrival was a great affair, that visits in such a house were rare, and that she was a person who would have liked a bustling place. When she pushed forward the heavy door behind me I felt my foot in the citadel and promised myself ever so firmly to keep it there. She pattered across the damp, stony lower hall and I followed her up the high staircase—stonier still, as it seemed—without an invitation. I think she had meant I should wait for her below, but such was not my idea, and I took up my station in the *sala*. She flitted, at the far end of it, into impenetrable regions, and I looked at the place with my heart beating as I had known it to do in dentists' parlours. It had a gloomy grandeur, but owed its character almost all to its noble shape and to the fine architectural doors, as high as those of grand

frontages, which, leading into the various rooms, repeated themselves on either side at intervals. They were surmounted with old, faded, painted escutcheons, and here and there in the spaces between them hung brown pictures, which I noted as speciously bad, in battered and tarnished frames that were yet more desirable than the canvases themselves. With the exception of several straw-bottomed chairs that kept their backs to the wall the grand obscure vista contained little else to minister to effect. It was evidently never used save as a passage, and scantily even as that. I may add that by the time the door through which the maid-servant had escaped opened again my eyes had grown used to the want of light.

I hadn't meanwhile meant by my private ejaculation that I must myself cultivate the soil of the tangled enclosure which lay beneath the windows, but the lady who came toward me from the distance over the hard, shining floor might have supposed as much from the way in which, as I went rapidly to meet her, I exclaimed, taking care to speak Italian: "The garden, the garden—do me the pleasure to tell me if it's yours!"

She stopped short, looking at me with wonder; and then, "Nothing here is mine," she answered in English, coldly and sadly.

"Oh, you're English; how delightful!" I ingenuously cried. "But surely the garden belongs to the house."

"Yes, but the house doesn't belong to me." She was a long, lean, pale person, habited apparently in a dull-coloured dressing-gown, and she spoke very simply and mildly. She didn't ask me to sit down, any more than years before—if she were the niece—she had asked Mrs. Prest, and we stood face to face in the empty, pompous hall.

"Well, then, would you kindly tell me to whom I must address myself? I'm afraid you will think me horribly intrusive, but you know I *must* have a garden—upon my honour I must!"

Her face was not young, but it was candid; it was not fresh, but it was clear. She had large eyes which were not bright, and a great deal of hair which was not "dressed," and long fine hands which were—possibly—not clean. She clasped these members almost convulsively as, with a confused, alarmed look, she broke out: "Oh, don't take it away from us; we like it ourselves!"

"You have the use of it then?"

"Oh, yes. If it wasn't for that—!" And she gave a wan, vague smile.

"Isn't it a luxury, precisely? That's why, intending to be in Venice some weeks, possibly all summer, and having some

literary work, some reading and writing to do, so that I must be quiet and yet if possible a great deal in the open air—that's why I've felt a garden to be really indispensable. I appeal to your own experience," I went on with as sociable a smile as I could risk. "Now can't I look at yours?"

"I don't know, I don't understand," the poor woman murmured, planted there and letting her weak wonder deal—helplessly enough, as I felt—with my strangeness.

"I mean only from one of those windows—such grand ones as you have here—if you'll let me open the shutters." And I walked toward the back of the house. When I had advanced half-way I stopped and waited as in the belief she would accompany me. I had been of necessity quite abrupt, but I strove at the same time to give her the impression of extreme courtesy. "I've looked at furnished rooms all over the place, and it seems impossible to find any with a garden attached. Naturally in a place like Venice gardens are rare. It's absurd if you like, for a man, but I can't live without flowers."

"There are none to speak of down there." She came nearer, as if, though she mistrusted me, I had drawn her by an invisible thread. I went on again, and she continued as she followed me: "We've a few, but they're very common. It costs too much to cultivate them; one has to have a man."

"Why shouldn't I be the man?" I asked. "I'll work without wages; or rather I'll put in a gardener. You shall have the sweetest flowers in Venice."

She protested against this with a small quaver of sound that might have been at the same time a gush of rapture for my free sketch. Then she gasped: "We don't know you—we don't know you."

"You know me as much as I know you; or rather much more, because you know my name. And if you're English I'm almost a countryman."

"We're not English," said my companion, watching me in practical submission while I threw open the shutters of one of the divisions of the wide high window.

"You speak the language so beautifully: might I ask what you are?" Seen from above the garden was in truth shabby, yet I felt at a glance that it had great capabilities. She made no rejoinder, she was so lost in her blankness and gentleness, and I exclaimed: "You don't mean to say you're also by chance American?"

"I don't know. We used to be."

"Used to be? Surely you haven't changed?"

"It's so many years ago. We don't seem to be anything now."

"So many years that you've been living here? Well, I don't wonder at that; it's a grand old house. I suppose you all use the garden," I went on, "but I assure you I shouldn't be in your way. I'd be very quiet and stay quite in one corner."

"We all use it?" she repeated after me vaguely, not coming close to the window but looking at my shoes. She appeared to think me capable of throwing her out.

"I mean all your family—as many as you are."

"There's only one other than me. She's very old. She never goes down."

I feel again my thrill at this close identification of Juliana; in spite of which, however, I kept my head. "Only one other in all this great house!" I feigned to be not only amazed but almost scandalised. "Dear lady, you must have space then to spare!"

"To spare?" she repeated—almost as for the rich unwonted joy of her spoken words.

"Why you surely don't live (two quiet women—I see *you* are quiet, at any rate) in fifty rooms!" Then with a burst of hope and cheer I put the question straight: "Couldn't you for a good rent let me two or three? That would set me up!"

I had now struck the note that translated my purpose, and I needn't reproduce the whole of the tune I played. I ended by making my entertainer believe me an undesigning person, though of course, I didn't even attempt to persuade her I was not an eccentric one. I repeated that I had studies to pursue; that I wanted quiet; that I delighted in a garden and had vainly sought one up and down the city; that I would undertake that before another month was over the dear old house should be smothered in flowers. I think it was the flowers that won my suit, for I afterwards found that Miss Tina—for such the name of this high tremulous spinster proved somewhat incongruously to be—had an insatiable appetite for them. When I speak of my suit as won I mean that before I left her she had promised me she would refer the question to her aunt. I invited information as to who her aunt might be and she answered "Why, Miss Bordereau!" with an air of surprise, as if I might have been expected to know. There were contradictions like this in Miss Tina which, as I observed later, contributed to make her rather pleasingly incalculable and interesting. It was the study of the two ladies to live so that the world shouldn't talk of them or touch them, and yet they had never altogether accepted the idea that it didn't hear of them. In Miss Tina at any rate a grateful susceptibility to human contact

had not died out, and contact of a limited order there would be if I should come to live in the house.

"We've never done anything of the sort ; we've never had a lodger or any kind of inmate." So much as this she made a point of saying to me. "We're very poor, we live very badly—almost on nothing. The rooms are very bare—those you might take ; they've nothing at all in them. I don't know how you'd sleep, how you'd eat."

"With your permission I could easily put in a bed and a few tables and chairs. *C'est la moindre des choses* and the affair of an hour or two. I know a little man from whom I can hire for a trifle what I should so briefly want, what I should use ; my gondolier can bring the things round in his boat. Of course, in this great house you must have a second kitchen, and my servant who's a wonderful handy fellow"—this personage was an evocation of the moment—"can easily cook me a chop there. My tastes and habits are of the simplest ; I live on flowers !" And then I ventured to add that if they were very poor it was all the more reason they should let their rooms. They were bad economists—I had never heard of such a waste of material.

I saw in a moment my good lady had never before been spoken to in any such fashion—with a humorous firmness that didn't exclude sympathy, that was quite founded on it. She might easily have told me that my sympathy was impertinent, but this by good fortune didn't occur to her. I left her with the understanding that she would submit the question to her aunt and that I might come back the next day for their decision.

"The aunt will refuse ; she'll think the whole proceeding very *louche* !" Mrs. Prest declared shortly after this, when I had resumed my place in her gondola. She had put the idea into my head and now—so little are women to be counted on—she appeared to take a despondent view of it. Her pessimism provoked me and I pretended to have the best hopes ; I went so far as to boast of a distinct prevision of success. Upon this Mrs. Prest broke out : "Oh, I see what's in your head ! You fancy you've made such an impression in five minutes that she's dying for you to come and can be depended on to bring the old one round. If you do get in you'll count it as a triumph."

I did count it as a triumph, but only for the commentator—in the last analysis—not for the man, who had not the tradition of personal conquest. When I went back on the morrow the little maid-servant conducted me straight through the long *sala*—it opened there as before in large perspective and was lighter now, which I thought a good omen—into the apartment from which

the recipient of my former visit had emerged on that occasion. It was a spacious, shabby parlour with a fine old painted ceiling under which a strange figure sat alone at one of the windows. They come back to me now almost with the palpitation they caused, the successive states marking my consciousness that as the door of the room closed behind me I was really face to face with the Juliana of some of Aspern's most exquisite and most renowned lyrics. I grew used to her afterwards, though never completely ; but as she sat there before me my heart beat as fast as if the miracle of resurrection had taken place for my benefit. Her presence seemed somehow to contain and express his own, and I felt nearer to him at that first moment of seeing her than I ever had been before or ever had been since. Yes, I remember my emotions in their order, even including a curious little tremor that took me when I saw the niece not to be there. With her, the day before, I had become sufficiently familiar, but it almost exceeded my courage—much as I had longed for the event—to be left alone with so terrible a relic as the aunt. She was too strange, too literally resurgent. Then came a check from the perception that we weren't really face to face, inasmuch as she had over her eyes a horrible green shade which served for her almost as a mask. I believed for the instant that she had put it on expressly, so that from underneath it she might take me all in without my getting at herself. At the same time it created a presumption of some ghastly death's-head lurking behind it. The divine Juliana as a grinning skull—the vision hung there until it passed. Then it came to me that she *was* tremendously old—so old that death might take her at any moment, before I could have time to compass my end. The next thought was a correction to that ; it lighted up the situation. She would die next week, she would die to-morrow—then I could pounce on her possessions and ransack her drawers. Meanwhile she sat there neither moving nor speaking. She was very small and shrunk, bent forward with her hands in her lap. She was dressed in black and her head was wrapped in a piece of old black lace which showed no hair.

My emotion keeping me silent she spoke first, and the remark she made was exactly the most unexpected.

3

“ Our house is very far from the centre, but the little canal is very *comme il faut*.”

“ It's the sweetest corner of Venice and I can imagine nothing

more charming," I hastened to reply. The old lady's voice was very thin and weak, but it had an agreeable, cultivated murmur and there was wonder in the thought that that individual note had been in Jeffrey Aspern's ear.

"Please do sit down there. I hear very well," she said quietly, as if perhaps I had been shouting; and the chair she pointed to was at a certain distance. I took possession of it, assuring her I was perfectly aware of my intrusion and of my not having been properly introduced, and that I could but throw myself on her indulgence. Perhaps the other lady, the one I had had the honour of seeing the day before, would have explained to her about the garden. That was literally what had given me courage to take a step so unconventional. I had fallen in love at sight with the whole place—she herself was probably so used to it that she didn't know the impression it was capable of making on a stranger—and I had felt it really a case to risk something. Was her own kindness in receiving me a sign that I was not wholly out in my calculation? It would make me extremely happy to think so. I could give her my word of honour that I was a most respectable, inoffensive person and that as a co-tenant of the palace, so to speak, they would be barely conscious of my existence. I would conform to any regulations, any restrictions, if they would only let me enjoy the garden. Moreover I should be delighted to give her references, guarantees; they would be of the very best, both in Venice and in England, as well as in America.

She listened to me in perfect stillness, and I felt her look at me with great penetration, though I could only see the lower part of her bleached and shrivelled face. Independently of the refining process of old age it had a delicacy which once must have been great. She had been very fair, she had had a wonderful complexion. She was silent a little after I had ceased speaking; then she began: "If you're so fond of a garden why don't you go to *terra firma*, where there are so many far better than this?"

"Oh, it's the combination!" I answered, smiling; and then with rather a flight of fancy: "It's the idea of a garden in the middle of the sea."

"This isn't the middle of the sea; you can't so much as see the water."

I stared a moment, wondering if she wished to convict me of fraud. "Can't see the water? Why, dear madam, I can come up to the very gate in my boat."

She appeared inconsequent, for she said vaguely in reply to this: "Yes, if you've got a boat. I haven't any; it's many years since I have been in one of the *gondole*." She uttered these words

as if they designed a curious far-away craft known to her only by hearsay.

"Let me assure you of the pleasure with which I would put mine at your service!" I returned. I had scarcely said this, however, before I became aware that the speech was in questionable taste and might also do me the injury of making me appear too eager, too possessed of a hidden motive. But the old woman remained impenetrable and her attitude worried me by suggesting that she had a fuller vision of me than I had of her. She gave me no thanks for my somewhat extravagant offer, but remarked that the lady I had seen the day before was her niece; she would presently come in. She had asked her to stay away a little on purpose—had had her reasons for seeing me first alone. She relapsed into silence and I turned over the fact of these unmentioned reasons and the question of what might come yet; also that of whether I might venture on some judicious remark in praise of her companion. I went so far as to say I should be delighted to see our absent friend again: she had been so very patient with me, considering how odd she must have thought me—a declaration which drew from Miss Bordercau another of her whimsical speeches.

"She has very good manners; I bred her up myself!" I was on the point of saying that that accounted for the easy grace of the niece, but I arrested myself in time, and the next moment the old woman went on: "I don't care who you may be—I don't want to know; it signifies very little to-day." This had all the air of being a formula of dismissal, as if her next words would be that I might take myself off now that she had had the amusement of looking on the face of such a monster of indiscretion. Therefore I was all the more surprised when she added in her soft, venerable quaver: "You may have as many rooms as you like—if you'll pay me a good deal of money."

I hesitated but an instant, long enough to measure what she meant in particular by this condition. First it struck me that she must have really a large sum in her mind; then I reasoned quickly that her idea of a large sum would probably not correspond to my own. My deliberation, I think, was not so visible as to diminish the promptitude with which I replied: "I will pay with pleasure and of course in advance whatever you may think it proper to ask me."

"Well, then, a thousand francs a month," she said instantly, while her baffling green shade continued to cover her attitude.

The figure, as they say, was startling and my logic had been at fault. The sum she had mentioned was, by the Venetian measure

of such matters, exceedingly large ; there was many an old palace in an out-of-the-way corner that I might on such terms have enjoyed the whole of by the year. But so far as my resources allowed I was prepared to spend money, and my decision was quickly taken. I would pay her with a smiling face what she asked, but in that case I would make it up by getting hold of my "spoils" for nothing. Moreover, if she had asked five times as much I should have risen to the occasion, so odious would it have seemed to me to stand chaffering with Aspern's Juliana. It was queer enough to have a question of money with her at all. I assured her that her views perfectly met my own and that on the morrow I should have the pleasure of putting three months' rent into her hand. She received this announcement with apparent complacency and with no discoverable sense that after all it would become her to say that I ought to see the rooms first. This didn't occur to her, and indeed, her serenity was mainly what I wanted. Our little agreement was just concluded when the door opened and the younger lady appeared on the threshold. As soon as Miss Bordereau saw her niece she cried out almost gaily : "He'll give three thousand—three thousand to-morrow!"

Miss Tina stood still, her patient eyes turning from one of us to the other ; then she brought out scarcely above her breath : "Do you mean francs ?"

"Did you mean francs or dollars ?" the old woman asked of me at this.

"I think francs were what you said," I sturdily smiled.

"That's very good," said Miss Tina, as if she had felt how overreaching her own question might have looked.

"What do *you* know ? You're ignorant," Miss Bordereau remarked ; not with acerbity but with a strange soft coldness.

"Yes, of money—certainly of money !" Miss Tina hastened to concede.

"I'm sure you've your own fine branches of knowledge," I took the liberty of saying genially. There was something painful to me, somehow, in the turn the conversation had taken, in the discussion of dollars and francs.

"She had a very good education when she was young. I looked into that myself," said Miss Bordereau. Then she added : "But she has learned nothing since."

"I have always been with *you*," Miss Tina rejoined very mildly, and of a certainty with no intention of an epigram.

"Yes, but for that—!" her aunt declared with more satirical force. She evidently meant that but for this her niece would never have got on at all ; the point of the observation, however,

being lost on Miss Tina, though she blushed at hearing her history revealed to a stranger. Miss Bordereau went on, addressing herself to me : " And what time will you come to-morrow with the money ? "

" The sooner the better. If it suits you I'll come at noon. "

" I am always here, but I have my hours, " said the old woman as if her convenience were not to be taken for granted.

" You mean the times when you receive ? "

" I never receive. But I'll see you at noon, when you come with the money. "

" Very good, I shall be punctual. " To which I added : " May I shake hands with you on our contract ? " I thought there ought to be some little form ; it would make me really feel easier, for I was sure there would be no other. Besides, though Miss Bordereau couldn't to-day be called personally attractive and there was something even in her wasted antiquity that bade one stand at one's distance, I felt an irresistible desire to hold in my own for a moment the hand Jeffrey Aspern had pressed.

For a minute she made no answer, and I saw that my proposal failed to meet with her approbation. She indulged in no movement of withdrawal which I half expected ; she only said coldly : " I belong to a time when that was not the custom. "

I felt rather snubbed. I exclaimed good-humouredly to Miss Tina : " Oh, you'll do as well ! " I shook hands with her while she assented with a small flutter. " Yes, yes, to show it's all arranged ! "

" Shall you bring the money in gold ? " Miss Bordereau demanded as I was turning to the door.

I looked at her a moment. " Aren't you a little afraid, after all, of keeping such a sum as that in the house ? " It was not that I was annoyed at her avidity, but was truly struck with the disparity between such a treasure and such scanty means of guarding it.

" Whom should I be afraid of if I'm not afraid of you ? " she asked with her shrunken grimness.

" Ah, well, " I laughed, " I shall be in point of fact a protector and I'll bring gold if you prefer. "

" Thank you, " the old woman returned with dignity and with an inclination of her head which evidently signified my dismissal. I passed out of the room, thinking how hard it would be to circumvent her. As I stood in the *sala* again I saw that Miss Tina had followed me, and I supposed that as her aunt had neglected to suggest I should take a look at my quarters it was her purpose to repair the omission. But she made no such overture ; she only

stood there with a dim, though not a languid smile, and with an effect of irresponsible, incompetent youth almost comically at variance with the faded facts of her person. She was not infirm, like her aunt, but struck me as more deeply futile, because her inefficiency was inward, which was not the case with Miss Bordereau's. I waited to see if she would offer to show me the rest of the house, but I didn't precipitate the question, inasmuch as my plan was from the moment to spend as much of my time as possible in her society. A minute, indeed, elapsed before I committed myself.

"I've had better fortune than I hoped. It was very kind of her to see me. Perhaps you said a good word for me."

"It was the idea of the money," said Miss Tina.

"And did you suggest that?"

"I told her you'd perhaps pay largely."

"What made you think that?"

"I told her I thought you were rich."

"And what put that into your head?"

"I don't know; the way you talked."

"Dear me, I must talk differently now," I returned. "I'm sorry to say it's not the case."

"Well," said Miss Tina, "I think that in Venice the *forestieri* in general often give a great deal for something that after all isn't much." She appeared to make this remark with a comforting intention, to wish to remind me that if I had been extravagant I wasn't foolishly singular. We walked together along the *sala*, and as I took its magnificent measure I said that I was afraid it wouldn't form part of my *quartiere*. Were my rooms by chance to be among those that opened into it? "Not if you go above—to the second floor," she answered as if she had rather taken for granted I would know my proper place.

"And I infer that that's where your aunt would like me to be."

"She said your apartments ought to be very distinct."

"That certainly would be best." And I listened with respect while she told me that above I should be free to take whatever I might like; that there was another staircase, but only from the floor on which we stood, and that to pass from it to the garden-level or to come up to my lodging I should have to cross the great hall. This was an immense point gained; I foresaw that it would constitute my whole leverage in my relations with the two ladies. When I asked Miss Tina how I was to manage at present to find my way up she replied with an access of that sociable shyness which constantly marked her manner:

"Perhaps you can't. I don't see—unless I should go with you." She evidently hadn't thought of this before.

We ascended to the upper floor and visited a long succession of empty rooms. The best of them looked over the garden ; some of the others had above the opposite rough-tiled house-tops a view of the blue lagoon. They were all dusty and even a little disfigured with long neglect, but I saw that by spending a few hundred francs I should be able to make three or four of them habitable enough. My experiment was turning out costly, yet now that I had all but taken possession I ceased to allow this to trouble me. I mentioned to my companion a few of the things I should put in, but she replied rather more precipitately than usual that I might do exactly what I liked : she seemed to wish to notify me that the Misses Bordcreau would take none but the most veiled interest in my proceedings. I guessed that her aunt had instructed her to adopt this tone, and I may as well say now that I came afterwards to distinguish perfectly (as I believed) between the speeches she made on her own responsibility and those the old woman imposed upon her. She took no notice of the unswept condition of the rooms and indulged neither in explanations nor in apologies. I said to myself that this was a sign Juliana and her niece—disenchanted idea!—were untidy persons with a low Italian standard ; but I afterwards recognised that a lodger who had forced an entrance had no *locus standi* as a critic. We looked out of a good many windows, for there was nothing within the rooms to look at, and still I wanted to linger. I asked her what several different objects in the prospect might be, but in no case did she appear to know. She was evidently not familiar with the view—it was as if she had not looked at it for years—and I presently saw that she was too preoccupied with something else to pretend to care for it. Suddenly she said—the remark was not suggested :

"I don't know whether it will make any difference to you, but the money is for me."

"The money—?"

"The money you're going to bring."

"Why, you'll make me wish to stay here two or three years!" I spoke as benevolently as possible, though it had begun to act on my nerves that these women so associated with Aspern should so constantly bring the pecuniary question back.

"That would be very good for me," she answered almost gaily.

"You put me on my honour!"

She looked as if she failed to understand this, but went on :
 "She wants me to have more. She thinks she's going to die."

"Ah, not soon I hope!" I cried with genuine feeling. I had perfectly considered the possibility of her destroying her documents on the day she should feel her end at hand. I believed that she would cling to them till then, and I was as convinced of her reading Aspern's letters over every night or at least pressing them to her withered lips. I would have given a good deal for some view of these solemnities. I asked Miss Tina if her venerable relative were seriously ill, and she replied that she was only very tired—she had lived so extraordinarily long. That was what she said herself—she wanted to die for a change. Besides, all her friends had been dead for ages; either they ought to have remained or she ought to have gone. That was another thing her aunt often said: she was not at all resigned—resigned, that is, to life.

"But people don't die when they like, do they?" Miss Tina inquired. I took the liberty of asking why, if there was actually enough money to maintain both of them, there would not be more than enough in case of her being left alone. She considered this difficult problem a moment and then said: "Oh, well, you know, she takes care of me. She thinks that when I'm alone I shall be a great fool and shan't know how to manage."

"I should have supposed rather that you took care of *her*. I'm afraid she's very proud."

"Why, have you discovered that already?" Miss Tina cried with a dimness of glad surprise.

"I was shut up with her there for a considerable time and she struck me, she interested me extremely. It didn't take me long to make my discovery. She won't have much to say to me while I'm here."

"No, I don't think she will," my companion averred.

"Do you suppose she has some suspicion of me?"

Miss Tina's honest eyes gave me no sign I had touched a mark. "I shouldn't think so—letting you in after all so easily."

"You call it easily? She has covered her risk," I said. "But where is it one could take an advantage of her?"

"I oughtn't to tell you if I knew, ought I?" And Miss Tina added, before I had time to reply to this, smiling dolefully: "Do you think we've any weak points?"

"That's exactly what I'm asking. You'd only have to mention them for me to respect them religiously."

She looked at me hereupon with that air of timid but candid and even gratified curiosity with which she had confronted me from the first; after which she said: "There's nothing to tell."

"We're terribly quiet. I don't know how the days pass. We've no life."

"I wish I might think I should bring you a little."

"Oh, we know what we want," she went on. "It's all right."

There were twenty things I desired to ask her : how in the world did they live ; whether they had any friends or visitors, any relations in America or in other countries. But I judged such probings premature ; I must leave it to a later chance. "Well, don't *you* be proud," I contented myself with saying. "Don't hide from me altogether."

"Oh, I must stay with my aunt," she returned without looking at me. And at the same moment, abruptly, without any ceremony of parting, she quitted me and disappeared, leaving me to make my own way downstairs. I stayed awhile longer, wandering about the bright desert—the sun was pouring in—of the old house, thinking the situation over on the spot. Not even the pattering little *serva* came to look after me, and I reflected that after all this treatment showed confidence.

4

PERHAPS it did, but all the same, six weeks later, towards the middle of June, the moment when Mrs. Prest undertook her annual migration, I had made no measurable advance. I was obliged to confess to her that I had no results to speak of. My first step had been unexpectedly rapid, but there was no appearance it would be followed by a second. I was a thousand miles from taking tea with my hostesses—that privilege of which, as I reminded my good friend, we both had had a vision. She reproached me with lacking boldness and I answered that even to be bold you must have an opportunity : you may push on through a breach, but you can't batter down a dead wall. She returned that the breach I had already made was big enough to admit an army and accused me of wasting precious hours in whimpering in her *salon* when I ought to have been carrying on the struggle in the field. It is true that I went to see her very often—all on the theory that it would console me (I freely expressed my discouragement) for my want of success on my own premises. But I began to feel that it didn't console me to be perpetually chaffed for my scruples, especially since I was really so vigilant ; and I was rather glad when my ironic friend closed her house for the summer. She had expected to gather amusement from the drama of my intercourse with the Misses Bordercau, and was

disappointed that the intercourse, and consequently the drama, had not come off. "They'll lead you on to your ruin," she said before she left Venice. "They'll get all your money without showing you a scrap." I think I settled down to my business with more concentration after her departure.

It was a fact that up to that time I had not, save on a single brief occasion, had even a moment's contact with my queer hostesses. The exception had occurred when I carried them according to my promise the terrible three thousand francs. Then I found Miss Tina awaiting me in the hall, and she took the money from my hand with a promptitude that prevented my seeing her aunt. The old lady had promised to receive me, yet apparently thought nothing of breaking that vow. The money was contained in a bag of chamois leather, of respectable dimensions, which my banker had given me, and Miss Tina had to make a big fist to receive it. This she did with extreme solemnity, though I tried to treat the affair a little as a joke. It was in no jocular strain, yet it was with a clearness akin to a brightness that she inquired, weighing the money in her two palms: "Don't you think it's too much?" To which I replied that this would depend on the amount of pleasure I should get for it. Hereupon she turned away from me quickly, as she had done the day before, murmuring in a tone different from any she had used hitherto: "Oh, pleasure, pleasure—there's no pleasure in this house!"

After that, for a long time, I never saw her, and I wondered the common chances of the day shouldn't have helped us to meet. It could only be evident that she was immensely on her guard against them; and in addition to this the house was so big that for each other we were lost in it. I used to look out for her hopefully as I crossed the *sala* in my comings and goings, but I was not rewarded with a glimpse of the tail of her dress. It was as if she never peeped out of her aunt's apartment. I used to wonder what she did there week after week and year after year. I had never met so stiff a policy of seclusion; it was more than keeping quiet—it was like hunted creatures feigning death. The two ladies appeared to have no visitors whatever and no sort of contact with the world. I judged at least that people couldn't have come to the house and that Miss Tina couldn't have gone out without my catching some view of it. I did what I disliked myself for doing—considering it but as once in a way: I questioned my servant about their habits and let him infer that I should be interested in any information he might glean. But he gleaned amazingly little for a knowing Venetian: it must be added that where there is a perpetual fast there are very few crumbs on the

floor. His ability in other ways was sufficient, if not quite all I had attributed to him on the occasion of my first interview with Miss Tina. He had helped my gondolier to bring me round a boat-load of furniture ; and when these articles had been carried to the top of the palace and distributed according to our associated wisdom he organised my household with such dignity as answered to its being composed exclusively of himself. He made me in short as comfortable as I could be with my indifferent prospects. I should have been glad if he had fallen in love with Miss Bordereau's maid or, failing this, had taken her in aversion ; either event might have brought about some catastrophe, and a catastrophe might have led to some parley. It was my idea that she would have been sociable, and I myself on various occasions saw her flit to and fro on domestic errands, so that I was sure she was accessible. But I tasted of no gossip from that fountain, and I afterwards learned that Pasquale's affections were fixed upon an object that made him heedless of other women. This was a young lady with a powdered face, a yellow cotton gown and much leisure, who used often to come to see him. She practised, at her convenience, the art of a stringer of beads—these ornaments are made in Venice to profusion ; she had her pocket full of them and I used to find them on the floor of my apartment—and kept an eye on the possible rival in the house. It was not for me, of course, to make the domestics tattle, and I never said a word to Miss Bordereau's cook.

It struck me as a proof of the old woman's resolve to have nothing to do with me that she should never have sent me a receipt for my three months' rent. For some days I looked out for it and then, when I had given it up, wasted a good deal of time in wondering what her reason had been for neglecting so indispensable and familiar a form. At first I was tempted to send her a reminder ; after which I put by the idea—against my judgment as to what was right in the particular case—on the general ground of wishing to keep quiet. If Miss Bordereau suspected me of ulterior aims she would suspect me less if I should be businesslike, and yet I consented not to be. It was possible she intended her omission as an impertinence, a visible irony, to show how she could overreach people who attempted to overreach her. On that hypothesis it was well to let her see that one didn't notice her little tricks. The real reading of the matter, I afterwards gathered, was simply the poor lady's desire to emphasise the fact that I was in the enjoyment of a favour as rigidly limited as it had been liberally bestowed. She had given me part of her house, but she wouldn't add to that so much as a morsel

of paper with her name on it. Let me say that even at first this didn't make me too miserable, for the whole situation had the charm of its oddity. I foresaw that I should have a summer after my own literary heart, and the sense of playing with my opportunity was much greater after all than any sense of being played with. There could be no Venetian business without patience, and since I adored the place I was much more in the spirit of it for having laid in a large provision. That spirit kept me perpetual company and seemed to look out at me from the revived immortal face—in which all his genius shone—of the great poet who was my prompter. I had invoked him and he had come ; he hovered before me half the time ; it was as if his bright ghost had returned to earth to assure me he regarded the affair as his own no less than as mine and that we should see it fraternally and fondly to a conclusion. It was as if he had said : " Poor dear, be easy with her ; she had some natural prejudices ; only give her time. Strange as it may appear to you she was very attractive in 1820. Meanwhile aren't we in Venice together, and what better place is there for the meeting of dear friends ? See how it glows with the advancing summer ; how the sky and the sea and the rosy air and the marble of the palaces all shimmer and melt together." My eccentric private errand became a part of the general romance and the general glory—I felt even a mystic companionship, a moral fraternity with all those who in the past had been in the service of art. They had worked for beauty, for a devotion ; and what else was I doing ? That element was in everything that Jeffrey Aspern had written, and I was only bringing it to light.

I lingered in the *sala* when I went to and fro ; I used to watch—as long as I thought decent—the door that led to Miss Bordercau's part of the house. A person observing me might have supposed I was trying to cast a spell on it or attempting some odd experiment in hypnotism. But I was only praying it might open or thinking what treasure probably lurked behind it. I hold it singular, as I look back, that I should never have doubted for a moment that the sacred relics were there ; never have failed to know the joy of being beneath the same roof with them. After all they were under my hand—they had not escaped me yet ; and they made my life continuous, in a fashion, with the illustrious life they had touched at the other end. I lost myself in this satisfaction to the point of assuming—in my quiet extravagance—that poor Miss Tina also went back, and still went back, as I used to phrase it. She did indeed, the gentle spinster, but not quite so far as Jeffrey Aspern, who was simple hearsay to her

quite as he was to me. Only she had lived for years with Juliana, she had seen and handled all mementoes and—even though she was stupid—some esoteric knowledge had rubbed off on her. That was what the old woman represented—esoteric knowledge ; and this was the idea with which my critical heart used to thrill. It literally beat faster often, of an evening when I had been out, as I stopped with my candle in the re-echoing hall on my way up to bed. It was as if at such a moment as that, in the stillness and after the long contradiction of the day, Miss Bordereau's secrets were in the air, the wonder of her survival more vivid. These were the acute impressions. I had them in another form, with more of a certain shade of reciprocity, during the hours I sat in the garden looking up over the top of my book at the closed windows of my hostess. In these windows no sign of life ever appeared ; it was as if, for fear of my catching a glimpse of them, the two ladies passed their days in the dark. But this only emphasised their having matters to conceal ; which I had wished to prove. Their motionless shutters became as expressive as eyes consciously closed, and I took comfort in the probability that, though invisible themselves, they kept me in view between the lashes.

I made a point of spending as much time as possible in the garden, to justify the picture I had originally given of my horticultural passion. And I not only spent time, but (hang it ! as I said) spent precious money. As soon as I had got my rooms arranged and could give the question proper thought I surveyed the place with a clever expert and made terms for having it put in order. I was sorry to do this, for personally, I liked it better as it was, with its weeds and its wild rich tangle, its sweet characteristic Venetian shabbiness. I had to be consistent, to keep my promise that I would smother the house in flowers. Moreover I clung to the fond fancy that by flowers I should make my way—I should succeed by big nosebags. I would batter the old woman with lilies—I would bombard their citadel with roses. Their door would have to yield to the pressure when a mound of fragrance should be heaped against it. The place in truth had been brutally neglected. The Venetian capacity for dawdling is of the largest, and for a good many days unlimited litter was all my gardener had to show for his ministrations. There was a great digging of holes and carting about of earth, and after a while I grew so impatient that I had thoughts of sending for my "results" to the nearest stand. But I felt sure my friends would see through the chinks of their shutters where such tribute *couldn't* have been gathered, and might so make up their minds against my veracity. I possessed my soul and finally, though the delay was long,

perceived some appearances of bloom. This encouraged me and I waited serenely enough till they multiplied. Meanwhile the real summer days arrived and began to pass, and as I look back upon them they seem to me almost the happiest of my life. I took more and more care to be in the garden, whenever it was not too hot. I had an arbour arranged and a low table and an arm-chair put into it ; and I carried out books and portfolios—I had always some business of writing in hand—and worked and waited and mused and hoped, while the golden hours elapsed and the plants drank in the light and the inscrutable old palace turned pale and then, as the day waned, began to recover and flush and my papers rustled in the wandering breeze of the Adriatic.

Considering how little satisfaction I got from it at first it is wonderful I shouldn't have grown more tired of trying to guess what mystic rites of ennui the Misses Bordercau celebrated in their darkened rooms ; whether this had always been the tenor of their life and how in previous years they had escaped elbowing their neighbours. It was supposable they had then had other habits, forms, and resources ; that they must once have been young or at least middle-aged. There was no end to the questions it was possible to ask about them and no end to the answers it was not possible to frame. I had known many of my country-people in Europe and was familiar with the strange ways they were liable to take up there ; but the Misses Bordercau formed altogether a new type of the American absentee. Indeed, it was clear the American name had ceased to have any application to them—I had seen this in the ten minutes spent in the old woman's room. You could never have said whence they came from the appearance of either of them ; wherever it was they had long ago shed and unlearned all native marks and notes. There was nothing in them one recognised or fitted, and, putting the question of speech aside, they might have been Norwegians or Spaniards. Miss Bordercau, after all, had been in Europe nearly three-quarters of a century ; it appeared by some verses addressed to her by Aspern on the occasion of his own second absence from America—verses of which Cumnor and I had after infinite conjecture established solidly enough the date—that she was even then, as a girl of twenty, on the foreign side of the sea. There was a profession in the poem—I hope not just for the phrase—that he had come back for her sake. We had no real light on her circumstances at that moment, any more than we had upon her origin, which we believed to be of the sort usually spoken of as modest. Cumnor had a theory that she had been a governess in some family in which the poet visited and that, in consequence of

her position, there was from the first something unavowed, or rather something quite clandestine, in their relations. I on the other hand had hatched a little romance according to which she was the daughter of an artist, a painter or a sculptor, who had left the Western world, when the century was fresh, to study in the ancient schools. It was essential to my hypothesis that this amiable man should have lost his wife, should have been poor and unsuccessful, and should have had a second daughter of a disposition quite different from Juliana's. It was also indispensable that he should have been accompanied to Europe by these young ladies and should have established himself there for the remainder of a struggling, saddened life. There was a further implication that Miss Bordereau had had in her youth a perverse and reckless, albeit a generous and fascinating character, and that she had braved some wondrous chances. By what passions had she been ravaged, by what adventures and sufferings had she been blanchèd, what store of memories had she laid away for the monotonous future?

I asked myself these things as I sat spinning theories about her in my arbour and the bees droned in the flowers. It was incontestable that, whether for right or wrong, most readers of certain of Aspern's poems (poems not as ambiguous as the sonnets—scarcely more divine, I think—of Shakespeare) had taken for granted that Juliana had not always adhered to the steep footway of renunciation. There hovered about her name a perfume of impenitent passion, an intimation that she had not been exactly as the respectable young person in general. Was this a sign that her singer had betrayed her, had given her away, as we say nowadays, to posterity? Certain it is that it would have been difficult to put one's finger on the passage in which her fair name suffered injury. Moreover, was not any fame fair enough that was so sure of duration and was associated with works immortal through their beauty? It was a part of my idea that the young lady had had a foreign lover—and say an unedifying tragical rupture—before her meeting with Jeffrey Aspern. She had lived with her father and sister in a queer, old-fashioned, expatriated, artistic Bohemia of the days when the æsthetic was only the academic and the painters who knew the best models of *contadina* and *pifferaro* wore peaked hats and long hair. It was a society less awake than the coteries of to-day—in its ignorance of the wonderful chances, the opportunities of the early bird, with which its path was strewn—to tatters of old stuff and fragments of old crockery; so that Miss Bordereau appeared not to have picked up or have inherited many objects of importance. There was no

enviable *bric-a-brac*, with its provoking legend of cheapness, in the room in which I had seen her. Such a fact as that suggested bareness, but none the less it worked happily into the sentimental interest I had always taken in the early movement of my countrymen as visitors to Europe. When Americans went abroad in 1820 there was something romantic, almost heroic in it, as compared with the perpetual ferryings of the present hour, the hour at which photography and other conveniences have annihilated surprise. Miss Bordereau had sailed with her family on a tossing brig in the days of long voyages and sharp differences ; she had had her emotions on the top of yellow diligences, passed the night at inns where she dreamed of travellers' tales, and was most struck, on reaching the Eternal City, with the elegance of Roman pearls and scarfs and mosaic brooches. There was something touching to me in all that, and my imagination frequently went back to the period. If Miss Bordereau carried it there, of course Jeffrey Aspern had at other times done so with greater force. It was a much more important fact, if one was looking at his genius critically, that he had lived in the days before the general transfusion. It had happened to me to regret that he had known Europe at all ; I should have liked to see what he would have written without that experience, by which he had incontestably been enriched. But as his fate had ruled otherwise I went with him—I tried to judge how the general old order would have struck him. It was not only there, however, I watched him ; the relations he had entertained with the special new had even a livelier interest. His own country after all had had most of his life, and his muse, as they said at that time, was essentially American. That was originally what I had prized him for ; that at a period when our native land was nude and crude and provincial, when the famous "atmosphere" it is supposed to lack was not even missed, when literature was lonely there and art and form almost impossible, he had found means to live and write like one of the first ; to be free and general and not at all afraid ; to feel, understand, and express everything.

5

I was seldom at home in the evening, for when I attempted to occupy myself in my apartments the lamplight brought in a swarm of noxious insects, and it was too hot for closed windows. Accordingly I spent the late hours either on the water—the moonlights of Venice are famous—or in the splendid square which

serves as a vast forecourt to the strange old church of Saint Mark. I sat in front of Florian's café eating ices, listening to music, talking with acquaintances : the traveller will remember how the immense cluster of tables and little chairs stretches like a promontory into the smooth lake of the Piazza. The whole place, of a summer's evening, under the stars and with all the lamps, all the voices and light footsteps on marble—the only sounds of the immense arcade that encloses it—is an open-air saloon dedicated to cooling drinks and to a still finer degustation, that of the splendid impressions received during the day. When I didn't prefer to keep mine to myself there was always a stray tourist, disencumbered of his Baedeker, to discuss them with, or some domesticated painter rejoicing in the return of the season of strong effects. The great basilica, with its low domes and bristling embroideries, the mystery of its mosaic and sculpture, looked ghostly in the tempered gloom, and the sea-breeze passed between the twin columns of the Piazzetta, the lintels of a door no longer guarded, as gently as if a rich curtain swayed there. I used sometimes on these occasions to think of the Misses Bordereau and of the pity of their being shut up in apartments which in the Venetian July even Venetian vastness couldn't relieve of some stuffiness. Their life seemed miles away from the life of the Piazza, and no doubt it was really too late to make the austere Juliana change her habits. But poor Miss Tina would have enjoyed one of Florian's ices, I was sure ; sometimes I even had thoughts of carrying one home to her. Fortunately my patience bore fruit and I was not obliged to do anything so ridiculous.

One evening about the middle of July I came in earlier than usual—I forget what chance had led to this—and instead of going up to my quarters made my way into the garden. The temperature was very high ; it was such a night as one would gladly have spent in the open air, and I was in no hurry to go to bed. I had floated home in my gondola, listening to the slow splash of the oar in the dark, narrow canals, and now the only thought that occupied me was that it would be good to recline at one's length in the fragrant darkness on a garden bench. The odour of the canal was doubtless at the bottom of that aspiration, and the breath of the garden, as I entered it, gave consistency to my purpose. It was delicious—just such an air as must have trembled with Romeo's vows when he stood among the thick flowers and raised his arms to his mistress's balcony. I looked at the windows of the palace to see if by chance the example of Verona—Verona being not far off—had been followed ; but everything was dim, as usual, and everything was still. Juliana might on the summer

nights of her youth have murmured down from open windows at Jeffrey Aspern, but Miss Tina was not a poet's mistress any more than I was a poet. This, however, didn't prevent my gratification from being great as I became aware on reaching the end of the garden that my younger *padrona* was seated in one of the bowers. At first I made out but an indistinct figure, not in the least counting on such an overture from one of my hostesses ; it even occurred to me that some enamoured maidservant had stolen in to keep a tryst with her sweetheart. I was going to turn away, not to frighten her, when the figure rose to its height and I recognised Miss Bordereau's niece. I must do myself the justice that I didn't wish to frighten her either, and much as I had longed for some such accident I should have been capable of retreating. It was as if I had laid a trap for her by coming home earlier than usual and by adding to that oddity my invasion of the garden. As she rose she spoke to me, and then I guessed that perhaps, secure in my almost inveterate absence, it was her nightly practice to take a lonely airing. There was no trap in truth, because I had had no suspicion. At first I took the words she uttered for an impatience of my arrival ; but as she repeated them—I hadn't caught them clearly—I had the surprise of hearing her say : " Oh, dear, I'm so glad you've come ! " She and her aunt had in common the property of unexpected speeches. She came out of the arbour almost as if to throw herself in my arms.

I hasten to add that I escaped this ordeal and that she didn't even then shake hands with me. It was an ease to her to see me and presently she told me why—because she was nervous when out of doors at night alone. The plants and shrubs looked so strange in the dark, and there were all sorts of queer sounds—she couldn't tell what they were—like the noises of animals. She stood close to me, looking about her with an air of greater security but without any demonstration of interest in me as an individual. Then I felt how little nocturnal prowlings could have been her habit, and I was also reminded—I had been afflicted by the same in talking with her before I took possession—that it was impossible to allow too much for her simplicity.

" You speak as if you were lost in the backwoods," I cheerfully laughed. " How you manage to keep out of this charming place when you've only three steps to take to get into it is more than I've yet been able to discover. You hide away amazingly so long as I'm on the premises, I know ; but I had a hope you peeped out a little at other times. You and your poor aunt are worse off than Carmelite nuns in their cells. Should you mind telling me how you exist without air, without exercise, without any sort of human

contact? I don't see how you carry on the common business of life."

She looked at me as if I had spoken a strange tongue, and her answer was so little of one that I felt it made for irritation. "We go to bed very early—earlier than you'd believe." I was on the point of saying that this only deepened the mystery, but she gave me some relief by adding:

"Before you came we weren't so private. But I've never been out at night."

"Never in these fragrant alleys, blooming here under your nose?"

"Ah," said Miss Tina, "they were never nice till now!" There was a finer sense in this and a flattering comparison, so that it seemed to me I had gained some advantage. As I might follow that further by establishing a good grievance I asked her why, since she thought my garden nice, she had never thanked me in any way for the flowers I had been sending up in such quantities for the previous three weeks. I had not been discouraged—there had been, as she would have observed, a daily armful; but I had been brought up in the common forms and a word of recognition now and then would have touched me in the right place.

"Why, I didn't know they were for me!"

"They were for both of you. Why should I make a difference?"

Miss Tina reflected as if she might be thinking of a reason for that, but she failed to produce one. Instead of this she asked abruptly: "Why in the world do you want so much to know us?"

"I ought, after all, to name a difference," I replied. "That question's your aunt's; it isn't yours. You wouldn't ask it if you hadn't been put up to it."

"She didn't tell me to ask you," Miss Tina replied without confusion. She was, indeed, the oddest mixture of shyness and straightness.

"Well, she has often wondered about it herself and expressed her wonder to you. She has insisted on it, so that she had put the idea into your head that I'm insufferably pushing. Upon my word, I think I've been very discreet. And how completely your aunt must have lost every tradition of sociability, to see anything out of the way in the idea that respectable, intelligent people, living as we do under the same roof, should occasionally exchange a remark! What could be more natural? We are of the same country and have at least some of the same tastes, since, like you, I'm intensely fond of Venice."

My friend seemed incapable of grasping more than one clause

in any proposition, and she now spoke quickly, eagerly, as if she were answering my whole speech : " I'm not in the least fond of Venice. I should like to go far away ! "

" Has she always kept you back so ? " I went on, to show her I could be as irrelevant as herself.

" She told me to come out to-night ; she has told me very often," said Miss Tina. " It is I who wouldn't come. I don't like to leave her."

" Is she too weak, is she really failing ? " I demanded, with more emotion, I think, than I meant to betray. I measured this by the way her eyes rested on me in the darkness. It embarrassed me a little, and to turn the matter off I continued genially : " Do let us sit down together comfortably somewhere—while you tell me all about her."

Miss Tina made no resistance to this. We found a bench less secluded, less confidential, as it were, than the one in the arbour ; and we were still sitting there when I heard midnight ring out from those clear bells of Venice which vibrate with a solemnity of their own over the lagoon and hold the air so much more than the chimes of other places. We were together more than an hour and our interview gave, as it struck me, a great lift to my undertaking. Miss Tina accepted the situation without a protest ; she had avoided me for three months, yet now she treated me almost as if these three months had made me an old friend. If I had chosen I might have gathered from this that though she had avoided me she had given a good deal of consideration to doing so. She paid no attention to the flight of time—never worried at my keeping her so long away from her aunt. She talked freely, answering questions and asking them and not even taking advantage of certain longish pauses by which they were naturally broken to say she thought she had better go in. It was almost as if she were waiting for something—something I might say to her—and intended to give me my opportunity. I was the more struck by this as she told me how much less well her aunt had been for a good many days, and in a way that was rather new. She was markedly weaker ; at moments she showed no strength at all ; yet more than ever before she wished to be left alone. That was why she had told her to come out—not even to remain in her own room, which was alongside ; she pronounced poor Miss Tina " a worry, a bore, and a source of aggravation." She sat still for hours together, as if for long sleep ; she had always done that, musing and dozing ; but at such times formerly she gave, in breaks, some small sign of life, of interest, liking her companion to be near her with her work. This sad personage confided to me that

at present her aunt was so motionless as to create the fear she was dead ; moreover, she scarce ate or drank—one couldn't see what she lived on. The great thing was that she still on most days got up ; the serious job was to dress her, to wheel her out of her bedroom. She clung to as many of her old habits as possible and had always, little company as they had received for years, made a point of sitting in the great parlour.

I scarce knew what to think of all this—of Miss Tina's sudden conversion to sociability and of the strange fact that the more the old woman appeared to decline to her end the less she should desire to be looked after. The story hung indifferently together, and I even asked myself if it mightn't be a trap laid for me, the result of a design to make me show my hand. I couldn't have told why my companions (as they could only by courtesy be called) should have this purpose—why they should try to trip up so lucrative a lodger. But at any hazard I kept on my guard, so that Miss Tina shouldn't have occasion again to ask what I might really be “up to.” Poor woman, before we parted for the night my mind was at rest as to what *she* might be. She was up to nothing at all.

She told me more about their affairs than I had hoped ; there was no need to be prying, for it evidently drew her out simply to feel me listen and care. She ceased wondering why I *should*, and at last, while describing the brilliant life they had led years before, she almost chattered. It was Miss Tina who judged it brilliant ; she said that when they first came to live in Venice, years and years back—I found her essentially vague about dates and the order in which events had occurred—there was never a week they hadn't some visitor or didn't make some pleasant *passaggio* in the town. They had seen all the curiosities ; they had even been to the Lido in a boat—she spoke as if I might think there was a way on foot ; they had had a collation there, brought in three baskets and spread out on the grass. I asked her what people she had known and she said, Oh, very nice ones—the Cavaliere Bombicci and the Contessa Altemura, with whom they had had a great friendship ! Also English people—the Churtons and the Goldies and Mrs. Stock-Stock, whom they had loved dearly ; she was dead and gone, poor dear. That was the case with most of their kind circle—this expression was Miss Tina's own ; though a few were left, which was a wonder, considering how they had neglected them. She mentioned the names of two or three Venetian old women ; of a certain doctor, very clever, who was so attentive—he came as a friend, he had really given up practice ; of the *avvocato* Pochintesta, who wrote beautiful

to another that I couldn't wait longer—that I really must take a sounding. So I went on : “ In general before I go to sleep (very often in bed ; it's a bad habit, but I confess to it) I read some great poet. In nine cases out of ten it's a volume of Jeffrey Aspern.”

I watched her well as I pronounced that name, but I saw nothing wonderful. Why should I, indeed ? Wasn't Jeffrey Aspern the property of the human race ?

“ Oh, *we* read him—we *have* read him,” she quietly replied.

“ He's my poet of poets—I know him almost by heart.”

For an instant Miss Tina hesitated ; then her sociability was too much for her. “ Oh, by heart—that's nothing ” ; and, though dimly, she quite lighted. “ My aunt used to know him—to know him ”—she paused an instant and I wondered what she was going to say—“ to know him as a visitor.”

“ As a visitor ? ” I guarded my tone.

“ He used to call on her and take her out.”

I continued to stare. “ My dear lady, he died a hundred years ago ! ”

“ Well,” she said amusingly, “ my aunt's a hundred and fifty.”

“ Mercy on us ! ” I cried ; “ why didn't you tell me before ? I should like so to ask her about him.”

“ She wouldn't care for that—she wouldn't tell you,” Miss Tina returned.

“ I don't care what she cares for ! She *must* tell me—it's not a chance to be lost.”

“ Oh, you should have come twenty years ago. Then she still talked about him.”

“ And what did she say ? ” I eagerly asked.

“ I don't know—that he liked her immensely.”

“ And she—didn't she like *him* ? ”

“ She said he was a god.” Miss Tina gave me this information flatly, without expression ; her tone might have made it a piece of trivial gossip. But it stirred me deeply as she dropped the words into the summer night ; their sound might have been the light rustle of an old unfolded love-letter.

“ Fancy, fancy ! ” I murmured. And then : “ Tell me this, please—has she got a portrait of him ? They're distressingly rare.”

“ A portrait ? I don't know,” said Miss Tina, and now there was discomfiture in her face. “ Well, good night ! ” she added ; and she turned into the house.

I accompanied her into the wide, dusky, stonepaved passage that corresponded on the ground floor with our grand *sala*. It

opened at one end into the garden, at the other upon the canal, and was lighted now only by the small lamp always left for me to take up as I went to bed. An extinguished candle which Miss Tina apparently had brought down with her stood on the same table with it. "Good night, good night!" I replied, keeping beside her as she went to get her light. "Surely you'd know, shouldn't you, if she had one?"

"If she had what?" the poor lady asked, looking at me queerly over the flame of her candle.

"A portrait of the god. I don't know what I wouldn't give to see it."

"I don't know what she has got. She keeps her things locked up." And Miss Tina went away toward the staircase with the sense evidently of having said too much.

I let her go—I wished not to frighten her—and I contented myself with remarking that Miss Bordereau wouldn't have locked up such a glorious possession as that: a thing a person would be proud of and hang up in a prominent place on the parlour-wall. Therefore of course she hadn't any portrait. Miss Tina made no direct answer to this and, candle in hand, with her back to me mounted two or three degrees. Then she stopped short and turned round, looking at me across the dusky space.

"Do you write—do you write?" There was a shake in her voice—she could scarcely bring it out.

"Do I write? Oh, don't speak of my writing on the same day with Aspern's!"

"Do you write about *him*—do you pry into his life?"

"Ah, that's your aunt's question; it can't be yours!" I said in a tone of slightly wounded sensibility.

"All the more reason, then, that you should answer it. Do you, please?"

I thought I had allowed for the falsehoods I should have to tell, but I found that in fact when it came to the point I hadn't. Besides, now that I had an opening there was a kind of relief in being frank. Lastly—it was perhaps fanciful, even fatuous—I guessed that Miss Tina personally wouldn't in the last resort be less my friend. So after a moment's hesitation I answered: "Yes, I've written about him and I'm looking for more material. In heaven's name have you got any?"

"*Santo Dio!*" she exclaimed, without heeding my question; and she hurried upstairs and out of sight. I might count upon her in the last resort, but for the present she was visibly alarmed. The proof of it was that she began to hide again, so that for a fortnight I kept missing her. I found my patience ebbing, and

after four or five days of this I told the gardener to stop the "floral tributes."

6

ONE afternoon, at last however, as I came down from my quarters to go out, I found her in the *sala* ; it was our first encounter on that ground since I had come into the house. She put on no air of being there by accident ; there was an ignorance of such arts in her honest, angular diffidence. That I might be quite sure she was waiting for me she mentioned it at once, but telling me with it that Miss Bordereau wished to see me : she would take me into the room at that moment if I had time. If I had been late for a love-tryst I would have stayed for this, and I quickly signified that I should be delighted to wait on my benefactress. "She wants to talk with you—to know you," Miss Tina said, smiling as if she herself appreciated that idea ; and she led me to the door of her aunt's apartment. I stopped her a moment before she had opened it, looking at her with some curiosity. I told her that this was a great satisfaction to me and a great honour ; but all the same I should like to ask what had made Miss Bordereau so markedly and suddenly change. It had been only the other day that she wouldn't suffer me near her. Miss Tina was not embarrassed by my question ; she had as many little unexpected serenities, plausibilities, almost, as if she told fibs, but the odd part of them was that they had on the contrary their source in her truthfulness. "Oh, my aunt varies," she answered ; "it's so terribly dull—I suppose she's tired." ¶

"But you told me she wanted more and more to be alone."

Poor Miss Tina coloured as if she found me too pushing. "Well, if you don't believe she wants to see you, I haven't invented it ! I think people often are capricious when they're very old."

"That's perfectly true. I only wanted to be clear as to whether you've repeated to her what I told you the other night."

"What you told me !"

"About Jeffrey Aspern—that I'm looking for materials."

"If I had told her, do you think she'd have sent for you ?"

"That's exactly what I want to know. If she wants to keep him to herself she might have sent for me to tell me so."

"She won't speak of him," said Miss Tina. Then as she opened the door she added in a lower tone : "I told her nothing."

The old woman was sitting in the same place in which I had seen her last, in the same position, with the same mystifying

bandage over her eyes. Her welcome was to turn her almost invisible face to me and show me that while she sat silent she saw me clearly. I made no motion to shake hands with her ; I now felt too well that this was out of place for ever. It had been sufficiently enjoined—too venerable to touch. There was something so grim in her aspect—it was partly the accident of her green shade—as I stood there to be measured, that I ceased on the spot to doubt her suspecting me, though I didn't in the least myself suspect that Miss Tina hadn't betrayed me, but the old woman's brooding instinct had served her ; she had turned me over and over in the long, still hours and had guessed. The worst of it was that she looked terribly like an old woman who at a pinch would, even like Sardanapalus, burn her treasure. Miss Tina pushed a chair forward, saying to me : " This will be a good place for you to sit." As I took possession of it I asked after Miss Bordereau's health ; expressed the hope that in spite of the very hot weather it was satisfactory. She answered that it was good enough—good enough ; that it was a great thing to be alive.

" Oh, as to that, it depends upon what you compare it with ! " I returned with a laugh.

" I don't compare—I don't compare. If I did that I should have given everything up long ago."

I liked to take this for a subtle allusion to the rapture she had known in the society of Jeffrey Aspern—though it was true that such an allusion would have accorded ill with the wish I imputed to her to keep him buried in her soul. What it accorded with was my constant conviction that no human being had ever had a happier social gift than his, and what it seemed to convey was that nothing in the world was worth speaking of if one pretended to speak of that. But one didn't pretend ! Miss Tina sat down beside her aunt, looking as if she had reason to believe some wonderful talk would come off between us.

" It's about the beautiful flowers," said the old lady ; " you sent us so many—I ought to have thanked you for them before. But I don't write letters and I receive company but at long intervals."

She hadn't thanked me while the flowers continued to come, but she departed from her custom so far as to send for me as soon as she began to fear they wouldn't come any more. I noted this ; I remembered what an acquisitive propensity she had shown me when it was a question of extracting gold from me, and I privately rejoiced at the happy thought I had had in suspending my tribute. She had missed it and was willing to make a concession to bring it back. At the first sign of this concession I could only go to

noted and never mentioned to me till some time afterwards that she might be supposed to know Florence better than I, as she had lived there for years with her kinswoman. At last she said with the shy impatience of a child : " Are we not really going to the Piazza ? That's what I want to see ! " I immediately gave the order that we should go straight, after which we sat silent with the expectation of arrival. As some time still passed, however, she broke out of her own movement : " I've found out what's the matter with my aunt : she's afraid you'll go ! "

I quite gasped. " What has put that into her head ? "

" She has had an idea you've not been happy. That's why she is different now. "

" You mean, she wants to make me happier ? "

" Well, she wants you not to go. She wants you to stay. "

" I suppose you mean on account of the rent, " I remarked candidly.

Miss Tina's candour but profited. " Yes, you know ; so that I shall have more. "

" How much does she want you to have ? " I asked with all the gaiety I now felt. " She ought to fix the sum, so that I may stay till it's made up. "

" Oh, that wouldn't please me, " said Miss Tina. " It would be unheard of, your taking that trouble. "

" But suppose I should have my own reasons for staying in Venice ? "

" Then it would be better for you to stay in some other house. "

" And what would your aunt say to that ? "

" She wouldn't like it at all. But I should think you'd do well to give up your reasons and go away altogether. "

" Dear Miss Tina, " I said, " it's not so easy to give up my reasons ! "

She made no immediate answer to this, but after a moment broke out afresh : " I think I know what your reasons are ! "

" I dare say, because the other night I almost told you how I wished you'd help me to make them good. "

" I can't do that without being false to my aunt. "

" What do you mean by being false to her ? "

" Why, she would never consent to what you want. She has been asked, she has been written to. It makes her fearfully angry. "

" Then she *has* papers of value ? " I precipitately cried.

" Oh, she has everything ! " sighed Miss Tina, with a curious weariness, a sudden lapse into gloom.

These words caused all my pulses to throb, for I regarded them

as precious evidence. I felt them too deeply to speak, and in the interval the gondola approached the Piazzetta. After we had disembarked I asked my companion if she would rather walk round the square or go and sit before the great café ; to which she replied that she would do whichever I liked best—I must only remember again how little time she had. I assured her there was plenty to do both, and we made the circuit of the long arcades. Her spirits revived at the sight of the bright shop-windows, and she lingered and stopped, admiring or disapproving of their contents, asking me what I thought of things, theorising about prices. My attention wandered from her ; her words of a while before, "Oh, she has everything!" echoed so in my consciousness. We sat down at last in the crowded circle at Florian's, finding an unoccupied table among those that were ranged in the square. It was a splendid night and all the world out of doors ; Miss Tina couldn't have wished the elements more auspicious for her return to society. I saw she felt it all even more than she told, but her impressions were wellnigh too many for her. She had forgotten the attraction of the world and was learning that she had for the best years of her life been rather mercilessly cheated of it. This didn't make her angry ; but as she took in the charming scene her face had, in spite of its smile of appreciation, the flush of a wounded surprise. She didn't speak, sunk in the sense of opportunities, for ever lost, that ought to have been easy ; and this gave me a chance to say to her : "Did you mean a while ago, that your aunt has a plan of keeping me on by admitting me occasionally to her presence?"

"She thinks it will make a difference with you if you sometimes see her. She wants you so much to stay that she's willing to make that concession."

"And what good does she consider I think it will do me to see her?"

"I don't know ; it must be interesting," said Miss Tina simply. "You told her you found it so."

"So I did ; but every one doesn't think that."

"No, of course not, or more people would try."

"Well, if she's capable of making that reflection she's capable also of making this further one," I went on : "that I must have a particular reason for not doing as others do, in spite of the interest she offers—for not leaving her alone." Miss Tina looked as if she failed to grasp this rather complicated proposition ; so I continued : "If you've not told her what I said to you the other night may she not at least have guessed it?"

"I don't know—she's very suspicious."

THE ASPERN PAPERS

"But she hasn't been made so by indiscreet curiosity, by persecution?"

"No, no; it isn't that," said Miss Tina, turning on me a troubled face. "I don't know how to say it; it's on account of something—ages ago, before I was born—in her life."

"Something? What sort of thing?" I asked it as if I could have no idea.

"Oh, she has never told me." And I was sure my friend spoke the truth.

Her extreme limpidity was almost provoking, and I felt for the moment that she would have been more satisfactory if she had been less ingenuous. "Do you suppose it's something to which Jeffrey Aspern's letters and papers—I mean the things in her possession—have reference?"

"I dare say it is!" my companion exclaimed as if this were a very happy suggestion. "I've never looked at any of those things."

"None of them? Then how do you know what they are?"

"I don't," said Miss Tina placidly. "I've never had them in my hands. But I've seen them when she has had them out."

"Does she have them out often?"

"Not now, but she used to. She's very fond of them."

"In spite of their being compromising?"

"Compromising?" Miss Tina repeated as if vague to what that meant. I felt almost as one who corrupts the innocence of youth.

"I allude to their containing painful memories."

"Oh, I don't think anything's painful."

"You mean there's nothing to affect her reputation?"

An odder look even than usual came at this into the face of Miss Bordereau's niece—a confession, it seemed, of helplessness, an appeal to me to deal fairly, generously with her. I had brought her to the Piazza, placed her among charming influences, paid her an attention she appreciated, and now I appeared to show it all as a bribe—a bribe to make her turn in some way against her aunt. She was of a yielding nature and capable of doing almost anything to please a person markedly kind to her; but the greatest kindness of all would be not to presume too much on this. It was strange enough, as I afterwards thought, that she had not the least air of resenting my want of consideration for her aunt's character, which would have been in the worst possible taste if anything less vital—from my point of view—had been at stake. I don't think she really measured it. "Do you mean she ever did something bad?" she asked in a moment.

"Heaven forbid I should say so, and it's none of my business.

Besides, if she did," I agreeably put it, "that was in other ages, in another world. But why shouldn't she destroy her papers?"

"Oh, she loves them too much."

"Even now, when she may be near her end?"

"Perhaps when she's sure of that she will."

"Well, Miss Tina," I said, "that's just what I should like you to prevent."

"How can I prevent it?"

"Couldn't you get them away from her?"

"And give them to you?"

This put the case, superficially, with sharp irony, but I was sure of her not intending that. "Oh, I mean that you might let me see them and look them over. It isn't for myself, or that I should want them at any cost to any one else. It's simply that they would be of such immense interest to the public, such immeasurable importance as a contribution to Jeffrey Aspern's history."

She listened to me in her usual way, as if I abounded in matters she had never heard of, and I felt almost as base as the reporter of a newspaper who forces his way into a house of mourning. This was marked when she presently said: "There was a gentleman who some time ago wrote to her in very much those words. He also wanted her papers."

"And did she answer him?" I asked, rather ashamed of not having my friend's rectitude.

"Only when he had written two or three times. He made her very angry."

"And what did she say?"

"She said he was a devil," Miss Tina replied categorically.

"She used that expression in her letter?"

"Oh, no; she said it to me. She made me write to him."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him there were no papers at all."

"Ah, poor gentleman!" I groaned.

"I knew there were, but I wrote what she bade me."

"Of course, you had to do that. But I hope I shan't pass for a devil."

"It will depend upon what you ask me to do for you," my companion smiled.

"Oh, if there's a chance of *your* thinking so my affair's in a bad way! I shan't ask you to steal for me, nor even to fib—for you *can't* fib, unless on paper. But the principal thing is this—to prevent her destroying the papers."

"Why, I've no control of her," said Miss Tina. "It's she who controls me."

"But she doesn't control her own arms and legs, does she? The way she would naturally destroy her letters would be to burn them. Now she can't burn them without a fire, and she can't get fire unless you give it to her."

"I've always done everything she has asked," my poor friend pleaded. "Besides, there's Olimpia."

I was on the point of saying that Olimpia was probably corruptible, but I thought it best not to sound that note. So I simply put it that this frail creature might perhaps be managed.

"Every one can be managed by my aunt," said Miss Tina. And then she remembered that her holiday was over; she must go home.

I laid my hand on her arm, across the table, to stay her a moment. "What I want of you is a general promise to help me."

"Oh, how *can* I, how *can* I?" she asked, wondering and troubled. She was half-surprised, half-frightened at my attaching that importance to her, at my calling on her for action.

"This is the main thing: to watch our friend carefully and warn me in time, before she commits that dreadful sacrilege."

"I can't watch her when she makes me go out."

"That's very true."

"And when you do too."

"Mercy on us—do you think she'll have done anything to-night?"

"I don't know. She's very cunning."

"Are you trying to frighten me?" I asked.

I felt this question sufficiently answered when my companion murmured in a musing, almost envious way: "Oh, but she loves them—she loves them!"

This reflection, repeated with such emphasis, gave me great comfort; but to obtain more of that balm I said: "If she shouldn't intend to destroy the objects we speak of before her death she'll probably have made some disposition by will."

"By will?"

"Hasn't she made a will for your benefit?"

"Ah, she has so little to leave. That's why she likes money," said Miss Tina.

"Might I ask, since we're really talking things over, what you and she live on?"

"On some money that comes from America, from a gentleman—I think a lawyer—in New York. He sends it every quarter. It isn't much!"

"And won't she have disposed of that?"

My companion hesitated—I saw she was blushing. "I believe

it's mine," she said ; and the look and tone which accompanied these words betrayed so the absence of the habit of thinking of herself that I almost thought her charming. The next instant she added : " But she had in an *avvocato* here once, ever so long ago. And some people came and signed something."

" They were probably witnesses. And you weren't asked to sign ? Well then," I argued, rapidly and hopefully, " it's because you're the legatee. She must have left all her documents to you ! "

" If she has it's with very strict conditions," Miss Tina responded, rising quickly, while the movement gave the words a small character of decision. They seemed to imply that the bequest would be accompanied with a proviso that the articles bequeathed should remain concealed from every inquisitive eye, and that I was very much mistaken if I thought her the person to depart from an injunction so absolute.

" Oh, of course, you'll have to abide by the terms," I said ; and she uttered nothing to mitigate the rigour of this conclusion. None the less, later on, just before we disembarked at her own door after a return which had taken place almost in silence, she said to me abruptly : " I'll do what I can to help you." I was grateful for this—it was very well so far as it went ; but it didn't keep me from remembering that night in a worried waking hour that I now had her word for it to re-enforce my own impression that the old woman was full of craft.

7

THE fear of what this side of her character might have led her to do made me nervous for days afterwards. I waited for an intimation from Miss Tina ; I almost read it as her duty to keep me informed, to let me know definitely whether or no Miss Bordereau had sacrificed her treasures. But as she gave no sign I lost patience and determined to put the case to the very touch of my own senses. I sent late one afternoon to ask if I might pay the ladies a visit, and my servant came back with surprising news. Miss Bordereau could be approached without the least difficulty ; she had been moved out into the *sala* and was sitting by the window that overlooked the garden. I descended and found this picture correct ; the old lady had been wheeled forth into the world and had a certain air, which came mainly perhaps from some brighter element in her dress, of being prepared again to have converse with it. It had not yet, however, begun to flock about her ; she was perfectly alone and, though the door stood

open, I had at first no glimpse of Miss Tina. The window at which she sat had the afternoon shade and, one of the shutters having been pushed back, she could see the pleasant garden, where the summer sun had by this time dried up too many of the plants—she could see the yellow light and the long shadows.

“Have you come to tell me you’ll take the rooms for six months more?” she asked as I approached her, startling me by something coarse in her cupidity almost as much as if she hadn’t already given me a specimen of it. Juliana’s desire to make our acquaintance lucrative had been, as I have sufficiently indicated, a false note in my image of the woman who had inspired a great poet with immortal lines; but I may say here definitely that I after all recognised large allowance to be made for her. It was I who had kindled the unholy flame; it was I who had put into her head that she had the means of making money. She appeared never to have thought of that; she had been living wastefully for years, in a house five times too big for her, on a footing that I could explain only by the presumption that, excessive as it was, the space she enjoyed cost her next to nothing and that, small as were her revenues, they left her, for Venice, an appreciable margin. I had descended on her one day and taught her to calculate, and my almost extravagant comedy on the subject of the garden had presented me irresistibly in the light of a victim. Like all persons who achieve the miracle of changing their point of view late in life, she had been intensely converted; she had seized my hint with a desperate, tremulous clutch.

I invited myself to go and get one of the chairs that stood, at a distance, against the wall—she had given herself no concern as to whether I should sit or stand; and while I placed it near her I began gaily: “Oh, dear madam, what an imagination you have, what an intellectual sweep! I’m a poor devil of a man of letters who lives from day to day. How can I take palaces by the year? My existence is precarious. I don’t know whether six months hence I shall have bread to put in my mouth. I’ve treated myself for once; it has been an immense luxury. But when it comes to going on——!”

“Are your rooms too dear? If they are you can have more for the same money,” Juliana responded. “We can arrange, we can *combinare*, as they say here.”

“Well, yes, since you ask me, they’re too dear, much too dear,” I said. “Evidently you suppose me richer than I am.”

She looked at me as from the mouth of her cave. “If you write books don’t you sell them?”

"Do you mean don't people buy them? A little, a very little—not so much as I could wish. Writing books, unless one be a great genius—and even then!—is the last road to fortune. I think there's no more money to be made by good letters."

"Perhaps you don't choose nice subjects. What do you write about?" Miss Bordereau implacably pursued.

"About the books of other people. I'm a critic, a commentator, an historian, in a small way." I wondered what she was coming to.

"And what other people now?"

"Oh, better ones than myself: the great writers mainly—the great philosophers and poets of the past; those who are dead and gone and can't, poor darlings, speak for themselves."

"And what do you say about them?"

"I say they sometimes attached themselves to very clever women!" I replied as for pleasantness. I had measured, as I thought, my risk, but as my words fell upon the air they were to strike me as imprudent. However, I had launched them and I wasn't sorry, for perhaps after all the old woman would be willing to treat. It seemed tolerably obvious that she knew my secret; why, therefore, drag the process out? But she didn't take what I had said as a confession; she only asked:

"Do you think it's right to rake up the past?"

"I don't feel that I know what you mean by raking it up. How can we get at it unless we dig a little? The present has such a rough way of treading it down."

"Oh, I like the past, but I don't like critics," my hostess declared with her hard complacency.

"Neither do I, but I like their discoveries."

"Aren't they mostly lies?"

"The lies are what they sometimes discover," I said, smiling at the quiet impertinence of this. "They often lay bare the truth."

"The truth is God's, it isn't man's; we had better leave it alone. Who can judge of it?—who can say?"

"We're terribly in the dark, I know," I admitted; "but if we give up trying what becomes of all the fine things? What becomes of the work I just mentioned, that of the great philosophers and poets? It's all vain words if there's nothing to measure it by."

"You talk as if you were a tailor," said Miss Bordereau whimsically; and then she added quickly and in a different manner: "This house is very fine; the proportions are magnificent. To-day I wanted to look at this part again. I made

them bring me out here. When your man came just now to learn if I would see you I was on the point of sending for you to ask if you didn't mean to go on. I wanted to judge what I'm letting you have. This *sala* is very grand," she pursued like an auctioneer, moving a little, as I guessed, her invisible eyes. "I don't believe you often have lived in such a house, eh?"

"I can't afford to!" I said.

"Well, then, how much will you give me for six months?"

I was on the point of exclaiming—and the air of excruciation in my face would have denoted a moral fact—"Don't, Juliana; for *his* sake, don't!" But I controlled myself and asked less passionately: "Why should I remain so long as that?"

"I thought you liked it," said Miss Bordereau, with her shrivelled dignity.

"So I thought I should."

For a moment she said nothing more, and I left my own words to suggest to her what they might. I half expected her to say, coldly enough, that if I had been disappointed we needn't continue the discussion, and this in spite of the fact that I believed her now to have in her mind—however it had come there—what would have told her that my disappointment was natural. But to my extreme surprise she ended by observing: "If you don't think we've treated you well enough perhaps we can discover some way of treating you better." This speech was somehow so incongruous that it made me laugh again, and I excused myself by saying that she talked as if I were a sulky boy pouting in the corner and having to be "brought round." I hadn't a grain of complaint to make; and could anything have exceeded Miss Tina's graciousness in accompanying me a few nights before to the Piazza? At this the old woman went on: "Well, you brought it on yourself!" And then in a different tone: "She's a very fine girl." I assented cordially to this proposition, and she expressed the hope that I did so not merely to be obliging, but that I really liked her. Meanwhile I wondered still more what Miss Bordereau was coming to. "Except for me, to-day," she said, "she hasn't a relation in the world." Did she, by describing her niece as amiable and unencumbered, wish to represent her as a *parti*?

It was perfectly true that I couldn't afford to go on with my rooms at a fancy price and that I had already devoted to my undertaking almost all the hard cash I had set apart for it. My patience and my time were by no means exhausted, but I should be able to draw upon them only on a more usual Venetian basis. I was willing to pay the precious personage with whom my

pecuniary dealings were such a discord twice as much as any other *padrona di casa* would have asked, but I wasn't willing to pay her twenty times as much. I told her so plainly, and my plainness appeared to have some success, for she exclaimed : "Very good ; you've done what I asked you—you've made an offer !"

"Yes, but not for half a year. Only by the month."

"Oh, I must think of that, then." She seemed disappointed that I wouldn't tie myself to a period, and I guessed that she wished both to secure me and to discourage me ; to say severely : "Do you dream that you can get off with less than six months ? Do you dream that even by the end of that time you'll be appreciably nearer your victory ?" What was most in my mind was that she had a fancy to play me the trick of making me engage myself when in fact she had sacrificed her treasure. There was a moment when my suspense on the point was so acute that I all but broke out with the question, and what kept it back was but an instinctive recoil—lest it should be a mistake—from the last violence of self-exposure. She was such a subtle old witch that one could never tell where one stood with her. You may imagine whether it cleared up the puzzle when, just after she had said she would think of my proposal and without any formal transition, she drew out of her pocket with an embarrassed hand a small object wrapped in a crumpled white paper. She held it there a moment and then resumed : "Do you know much about curiosities ?"

"About curiosities ?"

"About antiquities, the old gimcracks that people pay so much for to-day. Do you know the kind of price they bring ?"

I thought I saw what was coming, but I said ingenuously : "Do you want to buy something ?"

"No, I want to sell. What would an amateur give me for that ?" She unfolded the white paper and made a motion for me to take from her a small oval portrait. I possessed myself of it with fingers of which I could only hope that they didn't betray the intensity of their clutch, and she added : "I would part with it only for a good price."

At the first glance I recognised Jeffrey Aspern, and was well aware that I flushed with the act. As she was watching me, however, I had the consistency to exclaim : "What a striking face ! Do tell me who it is."

"He's an old friend of mine, a very distinguished man in his day. He gave it me himself, but I'm afraid to mention his name, lest you never should have heard of him, critic and historian as

you are. I know the world goes fast and one generation forgets another. He was all the fashion when I was young."

She was perhaps amazed at my assurance, but I was surprised at hers ; at her having the energy, in her state of health and at her time of life, to wish to sport with me to that tune simply for her private entertainment—the humour to test me and practise on me and befool me. This at least was the interpretation that I put upon her production of the relic, for I couldn't believe she really desired to sell it or cared for any information I might give her. What she wished was to dangle it before my eyes and put a prohibitive price on it. "The face comes back to me, it torments me," I said, turning the object this way and that and looking at it very critically. It was a careful but not a supreme work of art, larger than the ordinary miniature and representing a young man with a remarkably handsome face, in a high-collared green coat and a buff waistcoat. I felt in the little work a virtue of likeness and judged it to have been painted when the model was about twenty-five. There are, as all the world knows, three other portraits of the poet in existence, but none of so early a date as this elegant image. "I've never seen the original, clearly a man of a past age, but I've seen other reproductions of this face," I went on. "You expressed doubt of this generation's having heard of the gentleman, but he strikes me for all the world as a celebrity. Now who is he ? I can't put my finger on him—I can't give him a label. Wasn't he a writer ? Surely, he's a poet." I was determined that it should be she, not I, who should first pronounce Jeffrey Aspern's name.

My resolution was taken in ignorance of Miss Bordereau's extremely resolute character, and her lips never formed in my hearing the syllables that meant so much for her. She neglected to answer my question, but raised her hand to take back the picture, using a gesture which though impotent was in a high degree peremptory. "It's only a person who should know for himself that would give me my price," she said with a certain dryness.

"Oh, then you have a price ?" I didn't restore the charming thing ; not from any vindictive purpose, but because I instinctively clung to it. We looked at each other hard while I retained it.

"I know the least I would take. What it occurred to me to ask you about is the most I shall be able to get."

She made a movement, drawing herself together as if, in a spasm of dread at having lost her prize, she had been impelled to the immense effort of rising to snatch it from me. I instantly placed it in her hand again, saying as I did so : "I should like

to have it myself, but with your ideas it would be quite beyond my mark."

She turned the small oval plate over in her lap, with its face down, and I heard her catch her breath as after a strain or an escape. This, however, did not prevent her saying in a moment : " You'd buy a likeness of a person you don't know by an artist who has no reputation ? "

" The artist may have no reputation, but that thing's wonderfully well painted," I replied, to give myself a reason.

" It's lucky you thought of saying that, because the painter was my father."

" That makes the picture indeed precious ! " I returned with gaiety ; and I may add that a part of my cheer came from this proof I had been right in my theory of Miss Bordereau's origin. Aspern had, of course, met the young lady on his going to her father's studio as a sitter. I observed to Miss Bordereau that if she would entrust me with her property for twenty-four hours I should be happy to take advice on it ; but she made no other reply than to slip it in silence into her pocket. This convinced me still more that she had no sincere intention of selling it during her lifetime, though she may have desired to satisfy herself as to the sum her niece, should she leave it to her, might expect eventually to obtain for it. " Well, at any rate, I hope you won't offer it without giving me notice," I said as she remained irresponsive. " Remember me as a possible purchaser."

" I should want your money first ! " she returned with unexpected rudeness ; and then, as if she bethought herself that I might well complain of such a tone and wished to turn the matter off, asked abruptly what I talked about with her niece when I went out with her that way of an evening.

" You speak as if we set up the habit," I replied. " Certainly I should be very glad if it were to become our pleasant custom. But in that case I should feel a still greater scruple at betraying a lady's confidence."

" Her confidence ? Has my niece confidence ? "

" Here she is—she can tell you herself," I said ; for Miss Tina now appeared on the threshold of the old woman's parlour. " Have you confidence, Miss Tina ? Your aunt wants very much to know."

" Not in her, not in her ! " the younger lady declared, shaking her head with a dolefulness that was neither jocular nor affected. " I don't know what to do with her ; she has fits of horrid imprudence. She's so easily tired—and yet she has begun to roam, to drag herself about the house." And she looked down

at her yoke-fellow of long years with a vacancy of wonder, as if all their contact and custom hadn't made her perversities, on occasion, any more easy to follow.

"I know what I'm about. I'm not losing my mind. I dare say you'd like to think so," said Miss Bordereau with a crudity of cynicism.

"I don't suppose you came out here yourself. Miss Tina must have had to lend you a hand," I interposed for conciliation.

"Oh, she insisted we should push her ; and when she insists !" said Miss Tina, in the same tone of apprehension ; as if there were no knowing what service she disapproved of her aunt might force her next to render.

"I've always got most things done I wanted, thank God ! The people I've lived with have humoured me," the old woman continued, speaking out of the white ashes of her vanity.

I took it pleasantly up. "I suppose you mean they've obeyed you."

"Well, whatever it is—when they like one."

"It's just because I like you that I want to resist," said Miss Tina with a nervous laugh.

"Oh, I expect you'll bring Miss Bordereau upstairs next to pay me a visit," I went on ; to which the old lady replied :

"Oh, no ; I can keep an eye on you from here !"

"You're very tired ; you'll certainly be ill to-night !" cried Miss Tina.

"Nonsense, dear ; I feel better at this moment than I've done for a month. To-morrow I shall come out again. I want to be where I can see this clever gentleman."

"Shouldn't you perhaps see me better in your sitting-room ?" I asked.

"Don't you mean shouldn't you have a better chance at *me* ?" she returned, fixing me a moment with her green shade.

"Ah, I haven't that anywhere ! I look at you but don't see you."

"You agitate her dreadfully—and that's not good," said Miss Tina, giving me a reproachful, deterrent headshake.

"I want to watch you—I want to watch you !" Miss Bordereau went on.

"Well, then, let us spend as much of our time together as possible—I don't care where. That will give you every facility."

"Oh, I've seen you enough for to-day. I'm satisfied. Now I'll go home," Juliana said. Miss Tina laid her hands on the back of the wheeled chair and began to push, but I begged her to let me take her place. "Oh, yes, you may move me this way—you

shan't in any other!" the old woman cried as she felt herself propelled firmly and easily over the smooth, hard floor. Before we reached the door of her own apartment she bade me stop, and she took a long last look up and down the noble *sala*. "Oh, it's a prodigious house!" she murmured; after which I pushed her forward. When we had entered the parlour Miss Tina let me know she should now be able to manage, and at the same moment the little red-haired *donna* came to meet her mistress. Miss Tina's idea was evidently to get her aunt immediately back to bed. I confess that in spite of this urgency I was guilty of the indiscretion of lingering; it held me there to feel myself so close to the objects I coveted—which would be probably put away somewhere in the faded unsociable room. The place had indeed a bareness that suggested no hidden values; there were neither dusky nooks nor curtained corners, neither massive cabinets nor chests with iron bands. Moreover it was possible, it was perhaps even likely, that the old lady had consigned her relics to her bedroom, to some battered box that was shoved under the bed, to the drawer of some lame dressing-table, where they would be in the range of vision by the dim night-lamp. None the less I turned an eye on every article of furniture, on every conceivable cover for a hoard, and noticed that there were half a dozen things with drawers, and in particular a tall old secretary with brass ornaments of the style of the Empire—a receptacle somewhat infirm but still capable of keeping rare secrets. I don't know why this article so engaged me, small purpose as I had of breaking into it; but I stared at it so hard that Miss Tina noticed me and changed colour. Her doing this made me think I was right and that, wherever they might have been before, the Aspern papers at that moment languished behind the peevish little lock of the secretary. It was hard to turn my attention from the dull mahogany front when I reflected that a plain panel divided me from the goal of my hopes; but I gathered up my slightly scattered prudence and with an effort took leave of my hostess. To make the effort graceful I said to her that I should certainly bring her an opinion about the little picture.

"The little picture?" Miss Tina asked in surprise.

"What do *you* know about it, my dear?" the old woman demanded. "You needn't mind. I've fixed my price."

"And what may that be?"

"A thousand pounds."

"Oh, Lord!" cried poor Miss Tina irrepressibly.

"Is that what she talks to you about?" said Miss Bordereau.

"Imagine your aunt's wanting to know!" I had to separate

from my younger friend with only those words, though I should have liked immensely to add : " For heaven's sake meet me to-night in the garden ! "

8

As it turned out, the precaution had not been needed, for three hours later, just as I had finished my dinner, Miss Tina appeared, unannounced, in the open doorway of the room in which my simple repasts were served. I remember well that I felt no surprise at seeing her ; which is not a proof of my not believing in her timidity. It was immense, but in a case in which there was a particular reason for boldness it never would have prevented her from running up to my floor. I saw that she was now quite full of a particular reason ; it threw her forward—made her seize me, as I rose to meet her, by the arm.

" My aunt's very ill ; I think she's dying ! "

" Never in the world," I answered bitterly. " Don't you be afraid ! "

" Do go for a doctor—do, do ! Olimpia's gone for the one we always have, but she doesn't come back ; I don't know what has happened to her. I told her that if he wasn't at home she was to follow him where he had gone ; but apparently she's following him all over Venice. I don't know what to do—she looks as if she were sinking."

" May I see her, may I judge ? " I asked. " Of course I shall be delighted to bring someone ; but hadn't we better send my man instead, so that I may stay with you ? "

Miss Tina assented to this and I dispatched my servant for the best doctor in the neighbourhood. I hurried downstairs with her, and on the way she told me that an hour after I quitted them in the afternoon Miss Bordereau had had an attack of " oppression," a terrible difficulty in breathing. This had subsided, but had left her so exhausted that she didn't come up ; she seemed all spent and gone. I repeated that she wasn't gone, that she wouldn't go yet ; whereupon Miss Tina gave me a sharper sidelong glance than she had ever favoured me withal and said : " Really, what do you mean ? I suppose you don't accuse her of making-believe ! " I forget what reply I made to this, but I fear that in my heart I thought the old woman capable of any weird manoeuvre. Miss Tina wanted to know what I had done to her ; her aunt had told her I had made her so angry. I declared I had done nothing whatever—I had been exceedingly careful ; to

which my companion rejoined that our friend had assured her she had had a scene with me—a scene that had upset her. I answered with some resentment that the scene had been of *her* making—that I couldn't think what she was angry with me for unless for not seeing my way to give a thousand pounds for the portrait of Jeffrey Aspern. "And did she show you that? Oh, gracious—oh, deary me!" groaned Miss Tina, who seemed to feel the situation pass out of her control and the elements of her fate thicken round her. I answered her I'd give anything to possess it, yet that I had no thousand pounds; but I stopped when we came to the door of Miss Bordereau's room. I had an immense curiosity to pass it, but I thought it my duty to represent to Miss Tina that if I made the invalid angry she ought perhaps to be spared the sight of me. "The sight of you? Do you think she can *see*?" my companion demanded, almost with indignation. I did think so but forbore to say it, and I softly followed my conductress.

I remember that what I said to her as I stood for a moment beside the old woman's bed was: "Does she never show you her eyes, then? Have you never seen them?" Miss Bordereau had been divested of her green shade, but—it was not my fortune to behold Juliana in her nightcap—the upper half of her face was covered by the fall of a piece of dingy lacelike muslin, a sort of extemporised hood which, wound round her head, descended to the end of her nose, leaving nothing visible but her white, withered cheeks and puckered mouth, closed tightly and, as it were, consciously. Miss Tina gave me a glance of surprise, evidently not seeing a reason for my impatience. "You mean she always wears something? She does it to preserve them."

"Because they're so fine?"

"Oh, to-day, to-day!" And Miss Tina shook her head, speaking very low. "But they used to be magnificent!"

"Yes, indeed—we've Aspern's word for that." And as I looked again at the old woman's wrappings I could imagine her not having wished to allow any supposition that the great poet had overdone it. But I didn't waste my time in considering Juliana, in whom the appearance of respiration was so slight as to suggest that no human attention could ever help her more. I turned my eyes once more all over the room, rummaging with them the closets, the chests of drawers, the tables. Miss Tina at once noted their direction and read, I think, what was in them; but she didn't answer it, turning away restlessly, anxiously, so that I felt rebuked, with reason, for an appetite wellnigh indecent in the presence of our dying companion. All the same, I took another

view, endeavouring to pick out mentally the receptacle to try first, for a person who should wish to put his hand on Miss Bordereau's papers directly after her death. The place was a dire confusion ; it looked like the dressing-room of an old actress. There were clothes hanging over chairs, odd-looking shabby bundles here and there, and various paste-board boxes piled together battered, bulging, and discoloured, which might have been fifty years old. Miss Tina after a moment noticed the direction of my eyes again, and, as if she guessed how I judged such appearances—forgetting I had no business to judge them at all—said, perhaps to defend herself from the imputation of complicity in the disorder :

"She likes it this way ; we can't move things. There are old bandboxes she has had most of her life." Then she added, half-taking pity on my real thought : "Those things were *there*." And she pointed to a small, low trunk which stood under a sofa that just allowed room for it. It struck me as a queer, superannuated coffer, of painted wood, with elaborate handles and shrivelled straps and with the colour—it had last been endued with a coat of light green—much rubbed off. It evidently had travelled with Juliana in the olden time—in the days of her adventures, which it had shared. It would have made a strange figure arriving at a modern hotel.

"Were there—they aren't now?" I asked, startled by Miss Tina's implication.

She was going to answer, but at that moment the doctor came in—the doctor whom the little maid had been sent to fetch and whom she had at last overtaken. My servant, going on his own errand, had met her with her companion in tow, and in the sociable Venetian spirit, retracing his steps with them, had also come up to the threshold of the *padrona's* room, where I saw him peep over the doctor's shoulder. I motioned him away the more instantly that the sight of his prying face reminded me how little I myself had to do there—an admonition confirmed by the sharp way the little doctor eyed me, his air of taking me for a rival who had the field before him. He was a short, fat, brisk gentleman who wore the tall hat of his profession and seemed to look at everything but his patient. He kept me still in range, as if it struck him I too should be better for a dose, so that I bowed to him and left him with the women, going down to smoke a cigar in the garden. I was nervous ; I couldn't go further ; I couldn't leave the place. I don't know exactly what I thought might happen, but I felt it important to be there. I wandered about the alleys—the warm night had come on—smoking cigar after cigar

and studying the light in Miss Bordereau's windows. They were open now, I could see ; the situation was different. Sometimes the light moved, but not quickly ; it didn't suggest the hurry of a crisis. Was the old woman dying or was she already dead ? Had the doctor said that there was nothing to be done at her tremendous age but to let her quietly pass away ? or had he simply announced with a look a little more conventional that the end of the end had come ? Were the other two women just going and coming over the offices that follow in such a case ? It made me uneasy not to be nearer, as if I thought the doctor himself might carry away the papers with him. I bit my cigar hard while it assailed me again that perhaps there were now no papers to carry !

I wandered about an hour and more. I looked out for Miss Tina at one of the windows, having a vague idea that she might come there to give me some sign. Wouldn't she see the red tip of my cigar in the dark and feel sure I was hanging on to know what the doctor had said ? I'm afraid it's a proof of the grossness of my anxieties that I should have taken in some degree for granted at such an hour, in the midst of the greatest change that could fall on her, poor Miss Tina's having also a free mind for them. My servant came down and spoke to me ; he knew nothing save that the doctor had gone after a visit of half an hour. If he had stayed half an hour then Miss Bordereau was still alive : it couldn't have taken so long to attest her decease. I sent the man out of the house ; there were moments when the sense of his curiosity annoyed me, and this was one of them. *He* had been watching my cigar-tip from an upper window, if Miss Tina hadn't ; he couldn't know what I was after and I couldn't tell him, though I suspected in him fantastic private theories about me which he thought fine and which, had I more exactly known them, I should have thought offensive.

I went upstairs at last, but I mounted no higher than the *sala*. The door of Miss Bordereau's apartment was open, showing from the parlour the dimness of a poor candle. I went towards it with a light tread, and at the same moment Miss Tina appeared and stood looking at me as I approached. "She's better, she's better," she said even before I had asked. "The doctor has given her something ; she woke up, came back to life while he was there. He says there's no immediate danger."

"No immediate danger ? Surely he thinks her condition serious !"

"Yes, because she had been excited. That affects her dreadfully."

"It will do so again then, because she works herself up. She did so this afternoon."

"Yes, she mustn't come out any more," said Miss Tina with one of her lapses into a deeper detachment.

"What's the use of making such a remark as that," I permitted myself to ask, "if you begin to rattle her about again the first time she bids you?"

"I won't—I won't do it any more."

"You must learn to resist her," I went on.

"Oh, yes, I shall; I shall do so better if you tell me it's right."

"You mustn't do it for me—you must do it for yourself. It all comes back to you, if you're scared and upset."

"Well, I'm not upset now," said Miss Tina placidly enough. "She's very quiet."

"Is she conscious again—does she speak?"

"No, she doesn't speak, but she takes my hand. She holds it fast."

"Yes," I returned, "I can see what force she still has by the way she grabbed that picture this afternoon. But if she holds you fast how comes it that you're here?"

Miss Tina waited a little; though her face was in deep shadow—she had her back to the light in the parlour and I had put down my own candle far off, near the door of the *sala*—I thought I saw her smile ingenuously. "I came on purpose—I had heard your step."

"Why, I came on tiptoe, as soundlessly as possible."

"Well, I had heard you," said Miss Tina.

"And is your aunt alone now?"

"Oh, no—Olimpia sits there."

On my side I debated. "Shall we then pass in there?" And I nodded at the parlour; I wanted more and more to be on the spot."

"We can't talk there—she'll hear us."

I was on the point of replying that in that case we'd sit silent, but I felt too much this wouldn't do, there was something I desired so immensely to ask her. Thus I hinted we might walk a little in the *sala*, keeping more at the other end, where we shouldn't disturb our friend. Miss Tina assented unconditionally; the doctor was coming again, she said, and she would be there to meet him at the door. We strolled through the fine superfluous hall, where on the marble floor—particularly as at first we said nothing—our footsteps were more audible than I had expected. When we reached the other end—the wide window, inveterately closed, connecting with the balcony that overhung the canal—I

submitted that we had best remain there, as she would see the doctor arrive the sooner. I opened the window and we passed out on the balcony. The air of the canal seemed even heavier, hotter than that of the *sala*. The place was hushed and void ; the quiet neighbourhood had gone to sleep. A lamp, here and there, over the narrow black water glimmered in double ; the voice of a man going homeward singing, his jacket on his shoulder and his hat on his ear, came to us from a distance. This didn't prevent the scene from being very *comme il faut*, as Miss Bordereau had called it the first time I saw her. Presently a gondola passed along the canal with its slow, rhythmical splash, and as we listened we watched it in silence. It didn't stop, it didn't carry the doctor ; and after it had gone on I said to Miss Tina :

"And where are they now—the things that were in the trunk?"

"In the trunk?"

"That green box you pointed out to me in her room. You said her papers had been there ; you seemed to mean she had transferred them."

"Oh, yes ; they're not in the trunk," said Miss Tina.

"May I ask if you've looked?"

"Yes, I've looked—for you."

"How for me, dear Miss Tina? Do you mean you'd have given them to me if you had found them?"—and I fairly trembled with the question.

She delayed to reply and I waited. Suddenly she broke out :
"I don't know what I'd do—what I wouldn't!"

"Would you look again—somewhere else?"

She had spoken with a strange, unexpected emotion, and she went on in the same tone : "I can't—I can't—while she lies there. It isn't decent."

"No, it isn't decent," I replied gravely. "Let the poor lady rest in peace." And the words on my lips were not hypocritical, for I felt reprimanded and shamed.

Miss Tina added in a moment, as if she had guessed this and were sorry for me, but at the same time wished to explain that I did push her, or at least harp on the chord, too much : "I can't deceive her that way. I can't deceive her—perhaps on her death-bed."

"Heaven forbid I should ask you, though I've been guilty myself!"

"You've been guilty?"

"I've sailed under false colours." I felt now I must make a clean breast of it, must tell her I had given her an invented name on account of my fear her aunt would have heard of me and

so refuse to take me in. I explained this as well as that I had really been a party to the letter addressed them by John Cumnor months before.

She listened with great attention, almost in fact gaping for wonder, and when I had made my confession she said : " Then your real name—what is it ? " She repeated it over twice when I had told her, accompanying it with the exclamation : " Gracious, gracious ! " Then she added : " I like your own best."

" So do I "—and I felt my laugh rueful. " Ouf ! it's a relief to get rid of the other."

" So it was a regular plot—a kind of conspiracy ? "

" Oh, a conspiracy—we were only two," I replied, leaving out, of course, Mrs. Prest.

She considered ; I thought she was perhaps going to pronounce us very base. But this was not her way, and she remarked after a moment, as in candid, impartial contemplation : " How much you must want them ! "

" Oh, I do, passionately ! " I grinned, I fear to admit. And this chance made me go on, forgetting my compunction of a moment before. " How can she possibly have changed their place herself ? How can she walk ? How can she arrive at that sort of muscular exertion ? How can she lift and carry things ? "

" Oh, when one wants and when one has so much will ! " said Miss Tina as if she had thought over my question already herself and had simply had no choice but that answer—the idea that in the dead of night, or at some moment when the coast was clear, the old woman had been capable of a miraculous effort.

" Have you questioned Olimpia ? Hasn't she helped her—hasn't she done it for her ? " I asked ; to which my friend replied promptly and positively that their servant had had nothing to do with the matter, though without admitting definitely she had spoken to her. It was as if she were a little shy, a little ashamed now, of letting me see how much she had entered into my uneasiness and had me on her mind. Suddenly she said to me without any immediate relevance :

" I rather feel you a new person, you know, now that you've a new name."

" It isn't a new one ; it's a very good old one, thank fortune ! "

She looked at me a moment. " Well, I do like it better."

" Oh, if you didn't I would almost go on with the other ! "

" Would you really ? "

I laughed again, but I returned for all answer. " Of course if she can rummage about that way she can perfectly have burnt them."

THE ASPERN PAPERS

"You must wait—you must wait," Miss Tina mournfully moralised ; and her tone ministered little to my patience, for it seemed, after all, to accept that wretched possibility. I would teach myself to wait, I declared nevertheless ; because in the first place I couldn't do otherwise, and in the second I had her promise, given me the other night, that she would help me.

"Of course if the papers are gone that's no use," she said ; not as if she wished to recede, but only to be conscientious.

"Naturally. But if you could only find out !" I groaned, quivering again.

"I thought you promised you'd wait."

"Oh, you mean wait even for that ?"

"For what, then ?"

"Ah, nothing," I answered rather foolishly, being ashamed to tell her what had been implied in my acceptance of delay—the idea that she would perhaps do more for me than merely find out.

I know not if she guessed this ; at all events she seemed to bethink herself of some propriety of showing me more rigour. "I didn't promise to deceive, did I ? I don't think I did."

"It doesn't much matter whether you did or not, for you couldn't !"

Nothing is more possible than that she wouldn't have contested this even hadn't she been diverted by our seeing the doctor's gondola shoot into the little canal and approach the house. I noted that he came as fast as if he believed our proprietress still in danger. We looked down at him while he disembarked and then went back into the *sala* to meet him. When he came up, however, I naturally left Miss Tina to go off with him alone, only asking her leave to come back later for news.

I went out of the house and walked far, as far as the Piazza, where my restlessness declined to quit me. I was unable to sit down ; it was very late now though there were people still at the little table in front of the cafés : I could but uneasily revolve, and I did so half a dozen times. The only comfort, none the less, was in my having told Miss Tina who I really was. At last I took my way home again, getting gradually and all but inextricably lost, as I did whenever I went out in Venice : so that it was considerably past midnight when I reached my door. The *sala* upstairs was as dark as usual, and my lamp as I crossed it found nothing satisfactory to show me. I was disappointed, for I had notified Miss Tina that I would come back for a report, and I thought she might have left a light there as a sign. The door of the ladies' apartment was closed ; which seemed a hint that my faltering friend had gone to bed in impatience of waiting for me.

I stood in the middle of the place, considering, hoping she would hear me and perhaps peep out, saying to myself too that she would never go to bed with her aunt in a state so critical ; she would sit up and watch—she would be in a chair, in her dressing-gown. I went nearer the door ; I stopped there and listened. I heard nothing at all, and at last I tapped gently. No answer came, and after another minute I turned the handle. There was no light in the room ; this ought to have prevented my entrance, but it had no such effect. If I have frankly stated the importunities, the indelicacies, of which my desire to possess myself of Jeffrey Aspern's papers had made me capable I needn't shrink, it seems to me, from confessing this last indiscretion. I regard it as the worst thing I did, yet there were extenuating circumstances. I was deeply though doubtless not disinterestedly anxious for more news of Juliana, and Miss Tina had accepted from me, as it were, a rendezvous which it might have been a point of honour with me to keep. It may be objected that her leaving the place dark was a positive sign that she released me, and to this I can only reply that I wished not to be released.

The door of Miss Bordereau's room was open and I could see beyond it the faintness of a taper. There was no sound—my footstep caused no one to stir. I came further into the room ; I lingered there, lamp in hand. I wanted to give Miss Tina a chance to come to me if, as I couldn't doubt, she were still with her aunt. I made no noise to call her ; I only waited to see if she wouldn't notice my light. She didn't, and I explained this—I found afterwards I was right—by the idea that she had fallen asleep. If she had fallen asleep her aunt was not on her mind, and my explanation ought to have led me to go out as I had come. I must repeat again that it didn't, for I found myself at the same moment given up to something else. I had no definite purpose, no bad intention, but felt myself held to the spot by an acute, though absurd, sense of opportunity. Opportunity for what I couldn't have said, inasmuch as it wasn't in my mind that I might proceed to thievery. Even had this tempted me I was confronted with the evident fact that Miss Bordercau didn't leave her secretary, her cupboard, and the drawers of her table gaping. I had no keys, no tools, and no ambition to smash her furniture. None the less it came to me that I was now, perhaps alone, unmolested, at the hour of freedom and safety, nearer to the source of my hopes than I had ever been. I held up my lamp, let the light play on the different objects as if it could tell me something. Still there came no movement from the other room. If Miss Tina was sleeping she was sleeping sound. Was she

doing so—generous creature—on purpose to leave me the field ? Did she know I was there and was she just keeping quiet to see what I would do—what I *could* do ? Yet might I, when it came to that ? She herself knew even better than I how little.

I stopped in front of the secretary, gazing at it vainly and no doubt grotesquely ; for what had it to say to me after all ? In the first place it was locked, and in the second it almost surely contained nothing in which I was interested. Ten to one the papers had been destroyed, and even if they hadn't the keen old woman wouldn't have put them in such a place as that after removing them from the green trunk—wouldn't have transferred them, with the idea of their safety on her brain, from the better hiding-place to the worse. The secretary was more conspicuous, more exposed in a room in which she could no longer mount guard. It opened with a key, but there was a small brass handle, like a button as well ; I saw this as I played my lamp over it. I did something more for the climax of my crisis ; I caught a glimpse of the possibility that Miss Tina wished me really to understand. If she didn't so wish me, if she wished me to keep away, why hadn't she locked the door of communication between the sitting-room and the *sala* ? That would have been a definite sign that I was to leave them alone. If I didn't leave them alone she meant me to come for a purpose—a purpose now represented by the super-subtle inference that to oblige me she had unlocked the secretary. She hadn't left the key, but the lid would probably move if I touched the button. This possibility pressed me hard and I bent very close to judge. I didn't propose to do anything, not even—not in the least—to let down the lid ; I only wanted to test my theory, to see if the cover *would* move. I touched the button with my hand—a mere touch would tell me ; and as I did so—it is embarrassing for me to relate it—I looked over my shoulder. It was a chance, an instinct, for I had really heard nothing. I almost let my luminary drop and certainly I stepped back, straightening myself up at what I saw. Juliana stood there in her night-dress, by the doorway of her room, watching me ; her hands were raised, she had lifted the everlasting curtain that covered half her face, and for the first, the last, the only time I beheld her extraordinary eyes. They glared at me ; they were like the sudden drench, for a caught burglar, of a flood of gaslight ; they made me horribly ashamed. I never shall forget her strange little bent, white, tottering figure, with its lifted head, her attitude, her expression ; neither shall I forget the tone in which as I turned, looking at her, she hissed out passionately, furiously :

“ Ah, you publishing scoundrel ! ”

I can't now say what I stammered to excuse myself, to explain ; but I went toward her to tell her I meant no harm. She waved me off with her old hands, retreating before me in horror ; and the next thing I knew she had fallen back with a quick spasm, as if death had descended on her, into Miss Tina's arms.

9

I LEFT Venice the next morning, directly on learning that my hostess had not succumbed, as I feared at the moment, to the shock I had given her—the shock I may also say she had given me. How in the world could I have supposed her capable of getting out of bed by herself? I failed to see Miss Tina before going ; I only saw the *donna*, whom I entrusted with a note for her younger mistress. In this note I mentioned that I should be absent but a few days. I went to Treviso, to Bassano, to Castelfranco ; I took walks and drives and looked at musty old churches with ill-lighted pictures ; I spent hours seated smoking at the doors of cafés, where there were flies and yellow curtains, on the shady side of sleepy little squares. In spite of these pastimes which were mechanical and perfunctory, I scantily enjoyed my travels : I had had to gulp down a bitter draught and couldn't get rid of the taste. It had been devilish awkward, as the young men say, to be found by Juliana in the dead of night examining the attachment of her bureau ; and it had not been less so to have to believe for a good many hours after that it was highly probable I had killed her. My humiliation galled me, but I had to make the best of it, had, in writing to Miss Tina, to minimise it, as well as account for the posture in which I had been discovered. As she gave me no word of answer I couldn't know what impression I made on her. It rankled for me that I had been called a publishing scoundrel, since certainly I did publish and no less certainly hadn't been very delicate. There was a moment when I stood convinced that the only way to purge my dishonour was to take myself straight away on the instant ; to sacrifice my hopes and relieve the two poor women for ever of the oppression of my intercourse. Then I reflected that I had better try a short absence first, for I must already have had a sense (unexpressed and dim) that in disappearing completely it wouldn't be merely my own hopes I should condemn to extinction. It would perhaps answer if I kept dark long enough to give the elder lady time to believe herself rid of me. That she would wish to be rid of me after this—if I wasn't rid of her—was now not to be doubted ;

that midnight monstrosity would have cured her of the disposition to put up with my company for the sake of my dollars. I said to myself that after all I couldn't abandon Miss Tina, and I continued to say this even while I noted that she quite ignored my earnest request—I had given her two or three addresses, at little towns, *poste restante*—for some sign of her actual state. I would have made my servant write me news but that he was unable to manage a pen. Couldn't I measure the scorn of Miss Tina's silence—little disdainful as she had ever been? Really the soreness pressed; yet if I had scruples about going back I had others about not doing so, and I wanted to put myself on a better footing. The end of it was that I did return to Venice on the twelfth day; and as my gondola gently bumped against the palace steps a fine palpitation of suspense showed me the violence my absence had done me.

I had faced about so abruptly that I hadn't even telegraphed to my servant. He was therefore not at the station to meet me, but he poked out his head from an upper window when I reached the house. "They have put her into earth, *quella vecchia*," he said to me in the lower hall while he shouldered my valise; and he grinned and almost winked as if he knew I should be pleased with his news.

"She's dead!" I cried, giving a very different look.

"So it appears, since they've buried her."

"It's all over then? When was the funeral?"

"The other yesterday. But a funeral you could scarcely call it, signore: *roba da niente—un piccolo passeggio brutto* of two gondolas. *Poveretta!*" the man continued, referring apparently to Miss Tina. His conception of funerals was that they were mainly to amuse the living.

I wanted to know about Miss Tina, how she might be and generally where; but I asked him no more questions till we had got upstairs. Now that the fact had met me I took a bad view of it, especially of the idea that poor Miss Tina had had to manage by herself after the end. What did she know about such arrangements, about the steps to take in such a case? *Poveretta* indeed! I could only hope the doctor had given her support and that she hadn't been neglected by the old friends of whom she had told me, the little band of the faithful whose fidelity consisted in coming to the house once a year. I elicited from my servant that two old ladies and an old gentleman had in fact rallied round Miss Tina and had supported her—they had come for her in a gondola of their own—during the journey to the cemetery, the little red-walled island of tombs which lies to the north of the town

and on the way to Murano. It appeared from these signs that the Misses Bordereau were Catholics, a discovery I had never made, as the old woman couldn't go to church and her niece, so far as I perceived, either didn't, or went only to early mass in the parish before I was stirring. Certainly even the priests respected their seclusion ; I had never caught the whisk of the *curato's* skirt. That evening, an hour later, I sent my servant down with five words on a card to ask if Miss Tina would see me for a few moments. She was not in the house, where he had sought her, he told me when he came back, but in the garden walking about to refresh herself and picking the flowers quite as if they belonged to her. He had found her there and she would be happy to see me.

I went down and passed half an hour with poor Miss Tina. She had always had a look of musty mourning, as if she were wearing out old robes of sorrow that wouldn't come to an end ; and in this particular she made no different show. But she clearly had been crying, crying a great deal—simply, satisfyingly, refreshingly, with a primitive, retarded sense of solitude and violence. But she had none of the airs or graces of grief, and I was almost surprised to see her stand there in the first dusk with her hands full of admirable roses and smile at me with reddened eyes. Her white face, in the frame of her mantilla, looked longer, leaner than usual. I hadn't doubted her being irreconcilably disgusted with me, her considering I ought to have been on the spot to advise her, to help her ; and, though I believed there was no rancour in her composition and no great conviction of the importance of her affairs, I had prepared myself for a change in her manner, for some air of injury and estrangement, which should say to my conscience : " Well, you're a nice person to have professed things ! " But historic truth compels me to declare that this poor lady's dull face ceased to be dull, almost ceased to be plain, as she turned it gladly to her late aunt's lodger. That touched him extremely and he thought it simplified his situation until he found it didn't. I was as kind to her that evening as I knew how to be, and I walked about the garden with her as long as seemed good. There was no explanation of any sort between us ; I didn't ask her why she hadn't answered my letter. Still less did I repeat what I had said to her in that communication ; if she chose to let me suppose she had forgotten the position in which Miss Bordereau had surprised me and the effect of the discovery on the old woman, I was quite willing to take it that way : I was grateful to her for not treating me as if I had killed her aunt.

We strolled and strolled, though really not much passed

between us save the recognition of her bereavement, conveyed in my manner and in the expression she had of depending on me now, since I let her see I still took an interest in her. Miss Tina's was no breast for the pride or the pretence of independence; she didn't in the least suggest that she knew at present what would become of her. I forbore to press on that question, however, for I certainly was not prepared to say that I would take charge of her. I was cautious; not ignobly, I think, for I felt her knowledge of life to be so small that in her unsophisticated vision there would be no reason why—since I seemed to pity her—I shouldn't somehow look after her. She told me how her aunt had died, very peacefully at the last, and how everything had been done afterwards by the care of her good friends—fortunately, thanks to me, she said, smiling, there was money in the house. She repeated that when once the “nice” Italians like you they are your friends for life, and when we had gone into this she asked me about my *giro*, my impressions, my adventures, the places I had seen. I told her what I could, making it up partly, I'm afraid, as in my disconcerted state I had taken little in; and after she had heard me she exclaimed, quite as if she had forgotten her aunt and her sorrow: “Dear, dear, how much I should like to do such things—to take an amusing little journey!” It came over me for the moment that I ought to propose some enterprise, say I would accompany her anywhere she liked; and I remarked at any rate that a pleasant excursion—to give her a change—might be managed: we would think of it, talk it over. I spoke never a word of the Aspern documents, asked no questions as to what she had ascertained or what had otherwise happened with regard to them before Juliana's death. It wasn't that I wasn't on pins and needles to know, but that I thought it more decent not to show greed again so soon after the catastrophe. I hoped she herself would say something, but she never glanced that way, and I thought this natural at the time. Later on, however, that night, it occurred to me that her silence was matter for suspicion; since if she had talked of my movements, of anything so detached as the Giorgione at Castelfranco, she might have alluded to what she could easily remember was in my mind. It was not to be supposed that the emotion produced by her aunt's death had blotted out the recollection that I was interested in that lady's relics, and I fidgeted afterwards as it came to me that her reticence might very possibly just mean that no relics survived. We separated in the garden—it was she who said she must go in; now that she was alone on the *piano nobile* I felt that (judged at any rate by Venetian ideas) I was on rather a different footing in regard to the invasion

of it. As I shook hands with her for good night I asked her if she had some general plan, had thought over what she had best do. "Oh yes, oh yes, but I haven't settled anything yet," she replied quite cheerfully. Was her cheerfulness explained by the impression that I would settle for her?

I was glad the next morning that we had neglected practical questions, as this gave me a pretext for seeing her again immediately. There was a practical enough question now to be touched on. I owed it to her to let her know formally that of course I didn't expect her to keep me on as a lodger, as also to show some interest in her own tenure, what she might have on her hands in the way of a lease. But I was not destined, as befell, to converse with her for more than an instant on either of these points. I sent her no message; I simply went down to the *sala* and walked to and fro there. I knew she would come out; she would promptly see me accessible. Somehow I preferred not to be shut up with her; gardens and big halls seemed better places to talk. It was a splendid morning, with something in the air that told of the waning of the long Venetian summer; a freshness from the sea that stirred the flowers in the garden and made a pleasant draught in the house, less shuttered and darkened now than when the old woman was alive. It was the beginning of the autumn, of the end of the golden months. With this it was the end of my experiment—or would be in the course of half an hour, when I should really have learned that my dream had been reduced to ashes. After that there would be nothing left for me but to go to the station; for seriously—and as it struck me in the morning light—I couldn't linger there to act as guardian to a piece of middle-aged female helplessness. If she hadn't saved the papers wherein should I be indebted to her? I think I winced a little as I asked myself how much, if she *had* them, I should have to recognise and, as it were, reward such a courtesy. Mightn't that service after all saddle me with a guardianship? If this idea didn't make me more uncomfortable as I walked up and down it was because I was convinced I had nothing to look to. If the old woman hadn't destroyed everything before she pounced on me in the parlour she had done so the next day.

It took Miss Tina rather longer than I had expected to act on my calculation; but when at last she came out she looked at me without surprise. I mentioned I had been waiting for her and she asked why I hadn't let her know. I was glad a few hours later on that I had checked myself before remarking that a friendly intuition might have told her; it turned to comfort for me that I hadn't played even to that mild extent on her sensibility.

What I did say was virtually the truth—that I was too nervous, since I expected her now to settle my fate.

"Your fate?" said Miss Tina, giving me a queer look; and as she spoke I noticed a rare change in her. Yes, she was other than she had been the evening before—less natural and less easy. She had been crying the day before and was not crying now, yet she struck me as less confident. It was as if something had happened to her during the night, or at least as if she had thought of something that troubled her—something in particular that affected her relations with me, made them more embarrassing and more complicated. Had she simply begun to feel that her aunt's not being there now altered my position?

"I mean about our papers. *Are* there any? You must know now."

"Yes, there are a great many; more than I supposed." I was struck with the way her voice trembled as she told me this.

"Do you mean you've got them in there—and that I may see them?"

"I don't think you can see them," said Miss Tina, with an extraordinary expression of entreaty in her eyes, as if the dearest hope she had in the world now was that I wouldn't take them from her. But how could she expect me to make such a sacrifice as that after all that had passed between us? What had I come back to Venice for but to see them, to take them? My joy at learning they were still in existence was such that if the poor woman had gone down on her knees to beseech me never to mention them again I would have treated the proceeding as a bad joke. "I've got them but I can't show them," she lamentably added.

"Not even to me? Ah, Miss Tina!" I broke into a tone of infinite remonstrance and reproach.

She coloured and the tears came back to her eyes; I measured the anguish it cost her to take such a stand which a dreadful sense of duty had imposed on her. It made me quite sick to find myself confronted with that particular obstacle; all the more that it seemed to me I had been distinctly encouraged to leave it out of account. I quite held Miss Tina to have assured me that if she had no greater hindrance than that—! "You don't mean to say you made her a death-bed promise? It was precisely against your doing anything of that sort that I thought I was safe. Oh, I would rather she had burnt the papers outright than have to reckon with such a treachery as that."

"No, it isn't a promise," said Miss Tina.

"Pray what is it, then?"

She hung fire, but finally said : " She tried to burn them, but I prevented it. She had hid them in her bed."

" In her bed—— ? "

" Between the mattresses. That's where she put them when she took them out of the trunk. I can't understand how she did it, because Olimpia didn't help her. She tells me so, and I believe her. My aunt only told her afterwards, so that she shouldn't undo the bed—anything but the sheets. So it was very badly made," added Miss Tina simply.

" I should think so ! And how did she try to burn them ? "

" She didn't try much ; she was too weak those last days. But she told me—she charged me. Oh, it was terrible ! She couldn't speak after that night. She could only make signs."

" And what did you do ? "

" I took them away. I locked them up."

" In the secretary ? "

" Yes, in the secretary," said Miss Tina, reddening again.

" Did you tell her you'd burn them ? "

" No, I didn't—on purpose."

" On purpose to gratify me ? "

" Yes, only for that."

" And what good will you have done me if after all you won't show them ? "

" Oh, none. I know that—I know that," she dismally sounded.

" And did she believe you had destroyed them ? "

" I don't know what she believed at the last. I couldn't tell—she was too far gone."

" Then if there was no promise and no assurance I can't see what ties you."

" Oh, she hated it so—she hated it so ! She was so jealous. But here's the portrait—you may have that," the poor woman announced, taking the little picture, wrapped up in the same manner in which her aunt had wrapped it, out of her pocket.

" I may have it—do you mean you give it to me ? " I gasped as it passed into my hand.

" Oh, yes."

" But it's worth money—a large sum."

" Well ! " said Miss Tina, still with her strange look.

I didn't know what to make of it, for it could scarcely mean that she wanted to bargain like her aunt. She spoke as for making me a present. " I can't take it from you as a gift," I said, " and yet I can't afford to pay you for it according to the idea Miss Bordereau had of its value. She rated it at a thousand pounds."

" Couldn't we sell it ? " my friend threw off.

"God forbid ! I prefer the picture to the money."

"Well, then, keep it."

"You're very generous."

"So are you."

"I don't know why you should think so," I returned ; and this was true enough, for the good creature appeared to have in her mind some rich reference that I didn't in the least seize.

"Well, you've made a great difference for me," she said.

I looked at Jeffrey Aspern's face in the little picture, partly in order not to look at that of my companion, which had begun to trouble me, even to frighten me a little—it had taken so very odd, so strained and unnatural a cast. I made no answer to this last declaration ; I but privately consulted Jeffrey Aspern's delightful eyes with my own—they were so young and brilliant and yet so wise and so deep ; I asked him what on earth was the matter with Miss Tina. He seemed to smile at me with mild mockery ; he might have been amused at my case. I had got into a pickle for him—as if he needed it ! He was unsatisfactory for the only moment since I had known him. Nevertheless, now that I held the little picture in my hand I felt it would be a precious possession. "Is this a bribe to make me give up the papers ?" I presently and all perversely asked. "Much as I value this, you know, if I were to be obliged to choose the papers are what I should prefer. Ah, but ever so much !"

"How can you choose—how can you choose ?" Miss Tina returned slowly and woefully.

"I see ! Of course there's nothing to be said if you regard the interdiction that rests on you as quite insurmountable. In this case it must seem to you that to part with them would be an impiety of the worst kind, a simple sacrilege !"

She shook her head, only lost in the qucereness of her case. "You'd understand if you had known her. I'm afraid," she quavered suddenly—"I'm afraid ! She was terrible when she was angry."

"Yes, I saw something of that, that night. She was terrible. Then I saw her eyes. Lord, they were fine !"

"I see them—they stare at me in the dark !" said Miss Tina.

"You've grown nervous with all you've been through."

"Oh, yes, very—very !"

"You mustn't mind ; that will pass away," I said kindly. Then I added resignedly, for it really seemed to me that I must accept the situation : "Well, so it is, and it can't be helped. I must renounce." My friend, at this, with her eyes on me, gave a low soft moan, and I went on : "I only wish to goodness she had

destroyed them ; then there would be nothing more to say. And I can't understand why, with her ideas, she didn't."

"Oh, she lived on them!" said Miss Tina.

"You can imagine whether that makes me want less to see them," I returned not quite so desperately. "But don't let me stand here as if I had it in my soul to tempt you to anything base. Naturally, you understand, I give up my rooms. I leave Venice immediately." And I took up my hat, which I had placed on a chair. We were still rather awkwardly on our feet in the middle of the *sala*. She had left the door of the apartments open behind her, but had not led me that way.

A strange spasm came into her face as she saw me take my hat. "Immediately—do you mean to-day?" The tone of the words was tragic—they were a cry of desolation.

"Oh, no ; not so long as I can be of the least service to you."

"Well, just a day or two more—just two or three days," she panted. Then, controlling herself, she added in another manner : "She wanted to say something to me—the last day—something very particular. But she couldn't."

"Something very particular?"

"Something more about the papers."

"And did you guess—have you any idea?"

"No, I've tried to think—but I don't know. I've thought all kinds of things."

"As for instance?"

"Well, that if you were a relation it would be different."

I wondered. "If I were a relation——?"

"If you weren't a stranger. Then it would be the same for you as for me. Anything that's mine would be yours, and you could do what you like. I shouldn't be able to prevent you—and you'd have no responsibility."

She brought out this droll explanation with a nervous rush and as if speaking words got by heart. They gave me an impression of a subtlety which at first I failed to follow. But after a moment her face helped me to see further, and then the queerest of lights came to me. It was embarrassing, and I bent my head over Jeffrey Aspern's portrait. What an odd expression was in his face! "Get out of it as you can, my dear fellow!" I put the picture into the pocket of my coat and said to Miss Tina: "Yes, I'll sell it for you. I can't get a thousand pounds by any means, but I shall get something good."

She looked at me through pitiful tears, but seemed to try to smile as she returned: "We can divide the money."

"No, no, it shall be all yours." Then I went on: "I think I

know what your poor aunt wanted to say. She wanted to give directions that her papers should be buried with her."

Miss Tina appeared to weigh this suggestion ; after which she answered with striking decision : " Oh, no, she wouldn't have thought that safe ! "

" It seems to me nothing could be safer."

" She had an idea that when people want to publish they're capable— ! " And she paused, very red.

" Of violating a tomb ? Mercy on us, what must she have thought of me ! "

" She wasn't just, she wasn't generous ! " my companion cried with sudden passion.

The light that had come into my mind a moment before spread further. " Ah, don't say that, for we *are* a dreadful race." Then I pursued : " If she left a will that may give you some idea."

" I've found nothing of the sort—she destroyed it. She was very fond of me," Miss Tina added with an effect of extreme inconsequence. " She wanted me to be happy. And if any person should be kind to me—she wanted to speak of that."

I was almost awestricken by the astuteness with which the good lady found herself inspired, transparent astuteness as it was and stitching, as the phrase is, with white thread. " Depend upon it, she didn't want to make any provision that would be agreeable to *me*."

" No, not to you, but quite to me. She knew I should like it if you could carry out your idea. Not because she cared for you, but because she did think of me," Miss Tina went on with her unexpected, persuasive volubility. " You could see the things—you could use them." She stopped, seeing I grasped the sense of her conditional—stopped long enough for me to give some sign that I didn't give. She must have been conscious, however, that though my face showed the greatest embarrassment ever painted on a human countenance it was not set as a stone, it was also full of compassion. It was a comfort to me a long time afterwards to consider that she shouldn't have seen in me the smallest symptom of disrespect. " I don't know what to do ; I'm too tormented. I'm too ashamed ! " she continued with vehemence. Then, turning away from me and burying her face in her hands, she burst into a flood of tears. If she didn't know what to do it may be imagined whether I knew better. I stood there dumb, watching her while her sobs resounded in the great empty hall. In a moment she was up at me again with her streaming eyes. " I'd give you everything, and she'd understand, where she is—she'd forgive me ! "

"Ah, Miss Tina—ah, Miss Tina," I stammered for all reply. I didn't know what to do, as I say, but at a venture I made a wild, vague movement in consequence of which I found myself at the door. I remember standing there and saying : "It wouldn't do, it wouldn't do!"—saying it pensively, awkwardly, grotesquely, while I looked away to the opposite end of the *sala* as at something very interesting. The next thing I remember is that I was downstairs and out of the house. My gondola was there and my gondolier, reclining on the cushions, sprang up as soon as he saw me. I jumped in, and to his usual "*Dove commanda?*" replied, in a tone that made him stare : "Anywhere, anywhere ; out into the lagoon !"

He rowed me away and I sat there prostrate, groaning softly to myself, my hat pulled over my brow. What in the name of the preposterous did she mean if she didn't mean to offer me her hand ? That was the price—that was the price ! And did she think I wanted it, poor deluded, infatuated, extravagant lady ? My gondolier, behind me, must have seen my cars red as I wondered, motionless there under the fluttering *tenda* with my hidden face, noticing nothing as we passed—wondered whether her delusion, her infatuation had been my own reckless work. Did she think I had made love to her even to get the papers ? I hadn't, I hadn't ; I repeated that over to myself for an hour, for two hours, till I was wearied if not convinced. I don't know where, on the lagoon, my gondolier took me ; we floated aimlessly and with slow, rare strokes. At last I became conscious that we were near the Lido, far up, on the right hand, as you turn your back to Venice, and I made him put me ashore. I wanted to walk, to move, to shed some of my bewilderment. I crossed the narrow strip and got to the sea-beach—I took my way toward Malamocco. But presently I flung myself down again on the warm sand, in the breeze, on the coarse, dry grass. It took it out of me to think I had been so much at fault, that I had unwittingly but none the less deplorably trifled. But I hadn't given her cause—distinctly I hadn't. I had said to Mrs. Prest that I would make love to her ; but it had been a joke without consequences and I had never said it to my victim. I had been as kind as possible because I really liked her ; but since when had that become a crime where a woman of such an age and such an appearance was concerned ? I am far from remembering clearly the succession of events and feelings during this long day of confusion, which I spent entirely in wandering about, without going home, until late at night ; it only comes back to me that there were moments when I pacified my conscience and others when I lashed it into

pain. I didn't laugh all day—that I do recollect ; the case, however it might have struck others, seemed to me so little amusing. I should have been better employed perhaps in taking the comic side of it. At any rate, whether I had given cause or not, there was no doubt whatever that I couldn't pay the price. I couldn't accept the proposal. I couldn't, for a bundle of tattered papers, marry a ridiculous, pathetic, provincial old woman. It was a proof of how little she supposed the idea would come to me that she should have decided to suggest it herself in that practical, argumentative, heroic way—with the timidity, however, so much more striking than the boldness, that her reasons appeared to come first and her feelings afterward.

As the day went on I grew to wish I had never heard of Aspern's relics, and I cursed the extravagant curiosity that had put John Cumnor on the scent of them. We had more than enough material without them, and my predicament was the just punishment of that most fatal of human follies, our not having known when to stop. It was very well to say it was no predicament, that the way out was simple, that I had only to leave Venice by the first train in the morning, after addressing Miss Tina a note which should be placed in her hand as soon as I got clear of the house ; for it was strong proof of my quandary that when I tried to make up the note to my taste in advance—I would put it on paper as soon as I got home, before going to bed—I couldn't think of anything but "How can I thank you for the rare confidence you've placed in me ?" That would never do ; it sounded exactly as if an acceptance were to follow. Of course I might get off without writing at all, but that would be brutal, and my idea was still to exclude brutal solutions. As my confusion cooled I lost myself in wonder at the importance I had attached to Juliana's crumpled scraps ; the thought of them became odious to me and I was as vexed with the old witch for the superstition that had prevented her from destroying them as I was with myself for having already spent more money than I could afford in attempting to control their fate. I forgot what I did, where I went after leaving the Lido, and at what hour or with what recovery of composure I made my way back to my boat. I only know that in the afternoon, when the air was aglow with the sunset, I was standing before the church of Saints John and Paul and looking up at the small square-jawed face of Bartolommeo Collconi, the terrible *condottiere* who sits so sturdily astride of his huge bronze horse on the high pedestal on which Venetian gratitude maintains him. The statue is incomparable, the finest of all mounted figures, unless that of Marcus Aurelius, who rides benignant before the

Roman Capitol, be finer ; but I was not thinking of that ; I only found myself staring at the triumphant captain as if he had an oracle on his lips. The western light shines into all his grimness at that hour and makes it wonderfully personal. But he continued to look far over my head, at the red immersion of another day—he had seen so many go down into the lagoon through the centuries—and if he were thinking of battles and stratagems they were of a different quality from any I had to tell him of. He couldn't direct me what to do, gaze up at him as I might. Was it before this or after that I wandered about for an hour in the small canals, to the continued stupefaction of my gondolier, who had never seen me so restless and yet so void of a purpose and could extract from me no order but "Go anywhere—everywhere—all over the place?" He reminded me that I had not lunched and expressed, therefore, respectfully the hope that I would dine earlier. He had had long periods of leisure during the day, when I had left the boat and rambled, so that I was not obliged to consider him, and I told him that till the morrow, for reasons, I should touch no meat. It was an effect of poor Miss Tina's proposal, not altogether auspicious, that I had quite lost my appetite. I don't know why it happened that on this occasion I was more than ever struck with that queer air of sociability, of cousinship and family life, which makes up half the expression of Venice. Without streets and vehicles, the uproar of wheels, the brutality of horses, and with its little winding ways where people crowd together, where voices sound as in the corridors of a house, where the human step circulates as if it skirted the angles of furniture and shoes never wear out, the place has the character of an immense collective apartment, in which Piazza San Marco is the most ornamented corner and palaces and churches, for the rest, play the part of great divans of repose, tables of entertainment, expanses of decoration. And somehow the splendid common domicile, familiar, domestic and resonant, also resembles a theatre with its actors clicking over bridges and, in straggling processions, tripping along fondamentas. As you sit in your gondola the footways that in certain parts edge the canals assume to the eye the importance of a stage, meeting it at the same angle, and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro against the battered scenery of their little houses of comedy, strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe.

I went to bed that night very tired and without being able to compose an address to Miss Tina. Was this failure the reason why I became conscious the next morning as soon as I awoke of a determination to see the poor lady again the first moment she

would receive me? That had something to do with it, but what had still more was the fact that during my sleep the oddest revulsion had taken place in my spirit. I found myself aware of this almost as soon as I opened my eyes : it made me jump out of my bed with the movement of a man who remembers that he had left the house-door ajar or a candle burning under a shelf. Was I still in time to save my goods? That question was in my heart ; for what had now come to pass was that in the unconscious cerebration of sleep I had swung back to a passionate appreciation of Juliana's treasure. The pieces composing it were now more precious than ever and a positive ferocity had come into my need to acquire them. The condition Miss Tina had attached to that act no longer appeared an obstacle worth thinking of, and for an hour this morning my repentant imagination brushed it aside. It was absurd I should be able to invent nothing ; absurd to renounce so easily and turn away helpless from the idea that the only way to become possessed was to unite myself to her for life. I mightn't untie myself, yet I might still have what she had. I must add by the time I sent down to ask if she would see me I had invented no alternative, though in fact I drew out my dressing in the interest of my wit. This failure was humiliating, yet what could the alternative be? Miss Tina sent back word I might come ; and as I descended the stairs and crossed the *sala* to her door—this time she received me in her aunt's forlorn parlour—I hoped she wouldn't think my announcement was to be "favourable." She certainly would have understood my recoil of the day before.

As soon as I came into the room I saw that she had done so, but I also saw something which had not been in my forecast. Poor Miss Tina's sense of failure had produced a rare alteration in her, but I had been too full of stratagems and spoils to think of that. Now I took it in ; I can scarcely tell how it startled me. She stood in the middle of the room with a face of mildness bent upon me, and her look of forgiveness, of absolution, made her angelic. It beautified her ; she was younger ; she was not a ridiculous old woman. This trick of her expression, this magic of her spirit, transfigured her, and while I still noted it I heard a whisper somewhere in the depths of my conscience : "Why not, after all—why not?" It seemed to me I *could* pay the price. Still more distinctly, however, than the whisper I heard Miss Tina's own voice. I was so struck with the different effect she made on me that at first I wasn't clearly aware of what she was saying ; then I recognised she had bade me good-bye—she said something about hoping I should be very happy.

"Good-bye—good-bye?" I repeated with an inflection interrogative and probably foolish.

I saw she didn't feel the interrogation, she only heard the words; she had strung herself up to accepting our separation and they fell upon her ear as a proof. "Are you going to-day?" she asked. "But it doesn't matter, for whenever you go I shall not see you again. I don't want to." And she smiled strangely, with an infinite gentleness. She had never doubted my having left her the day before in horror. How *could* she, since I hadn't come back before night to contradict, even as a simple form, even as an act of common humanity, such an idea? And now she had the force of soul—Miss Tina with a force of soul was a new conception—to smile at me in her abjection.

"What shall you do—where shall you go?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I've done the great thing. I've destroyed the papers."

"Destroyed them?" I waited.

"Yes; what was I to keep them for? I burnt them last night, one by one in the kitchen."

"One by one?" I coldly echoed it.

"It took a long time—there were so many." The room seemed to go round me as she said this, and a real darkness for a moment descended on my eyes. When it passed, Miss Tina was there still, but the transfiguration was over and she had changed back to a plain, dingy, elderly person. It was in this character she spoke as she said: "I can't stay with you longer, I can't"; and it was in this character she turned her back upon me, as I had turned mine upon her twenty-four hours before, and moved to the door of her room. Here she did what I hadn't done when I quitted her—she paused long enough to give me one look. I have never forgotten it and I sometimes still suffer from it, though it was not resentful. No, there was no resentment, nothing hard or vindictive in poor Miss Tina; for when, later, I sent her, as the price of the portrait of Jeffrey Aspern, a larger sum of money than I had hoped to gather for her, writing to her that I had sold the picture, she kept it with thanks; she never sent it back. I wrote her that I had sold the picture, but I admitted to Mrs. Prerst at the time—I met this other friend in London that autumn—that it hangs above my writing-table. When I look at it I can scarcely bear my loss—I mean of the precious papers.

BROOKSMITH

WE are scattered now, the friends of the late Mr. Oliver Offord ; but whenever we chance to meet I think we are conscious of a certain esoteric respect for each other. " Yes, you too have been in Arcadia," we seem not too grumpily to allow. When I pass the house in Mansfield Street I remember that Arcadia was there. I don't know who has it now, and don't want to know ; it's enough to be so sure that if I should ring the bell there would be no such luck for me as that Brooksmith should open the door. Mr. Offord, the most agreeable, the most attaching of bachelors, was a retired diplomat living on his pension and on something of his own over and above ; a good deal confined, by his infirmities, to his fireside and delighted to be found there any afternoon in the year, from five o'clock on, by such visitors as Brooksmith allowed to come up. Brooksmith was his butler and his most intimate friend, to whom we all stood, or I should say sat, in the same relation in which the subject of the sovereign finds himself to the prime minister. By having been for years, in foreign lands, the most delightful Englishman any one had ever known, Mr. Offord had in my opinion rendered signal service to his country. But I suppose he had been too much liked—liked even by those who didn't like *it*—so that as people of that sort never get titles or dotations for the horrid things they've *not* done, his principal reward was simply that we went to see him.

Oh we went perpetually, and it was not our fault if he was not overwhelmed with this particular honour. Any visitor who came once came again ; to come merely once was a slight nobody, I'm sure, had ever put upon him. His circle therefore was essentially composed of habitués, who were habitués for each other as well as for him, as those of a happy salon should be. I remember vividly every element of the place, down to the intensely Londonish look of the grey opposite houses, in the gap of the white curtains of the high windows, and the exact spot where, on a particular afternoon, I put down my tea-cup for Brooksmith, lingering an instant, to gather it up as if he were plucking a flower. Mr. Offord's drawing-room was indeed Brooksmith's garden, his pruned and tended human parterre, and if we all flourished there and grew well in our places it was largely owing to his supervision.

Many persons have heard much, though most have doubtless

seen little, of the famous institution of the salon, and many are born to the depression of knowing that this finest flower of social life refuses to bloom where the English tongue is spoken. The explanation is usually that our women have not the skill to cultivate it—the art to direct through a smiling land, between suggestive shores, a sinuous stream of talk. My affectionate, my pious memory of Mr. Offord contradicts this induction only, I fear, more insidiously to confirm it. The sallow and slightly smoked drawing-room in which he spent so large a portion of the last years of his life certainly deserved the distinguished name ; but on the other hand it couldn't be said at all to owe its stamp to any intervention throwing into relief the fact that there was no Mrs. Offord. The dear man had indeed, at the most, been capable of one of those sacrifices to which women are deemed peculiarly apt : he had recognised—under the influence, in some degree, it is true, of physical infirmity—that if you wish people to find you at home you must manage not to be out. He had in short accepted the truth which many dabblers in the social art are slow to learn, that you must really, as they say, take a line, and that the only way as yet discovered of being at home is to stay at home. Finally his own fireside had become a summary of his habits. Why should he ever have left it ?—since this would have been leaving what was notoriously pleasantest in London, the compact charmed cluster (thinning away indeed into casual couples) round the fine old last-century chimney-piece which, with the exception of the remarkable collection of miniatures, was the best thing the place contained. Mr. Offord wasn't rich ; he had nothing but his pension and the use for life of the somewhat superannuated house.

When I'm reminded by some opposed discomfort of the present hour how perfectly we were all handled there, I ask myself once more what had been the secret of such perfection. One had taken it for granted at the time, for anything that is supremely good produces more acceptance than surprise. I felt we were all happy, but I didn't consider how our happiness was managed. And yet there were questions to be asked, questions that strike me as singularly obvious now that there's nobody to answer them. Mr. Offord has solved the insoluble ; he had, without feminine help—save in the sense that ladies were dying to come to him and that he saved the lives of several—established a salon ; but I might have guessed that there was a method in his madness, a law in his success. He hadn't hit it off by a mere fluke. There was an art in it all, and how was the art so hidden ? Who indeed if it came to that was the occult artist ? Launching this enquiry

the other day I had already got hold of the tail of my reply. I was helped by the very wonder of some of the conditions that came back to me—those that used to seem as natural as sunshine in a fine climate.

How was it for instance that we never were a crowd, never either too many or too few, always the right people *with* the right people—there must really have been no wrong people at all—always coming and going, never sticking fast nor overstaying, yet never popping in or out with an indecorous familiarity? How was it that we all sat where we wanted and moved when we wanted and met whom we wanted and escaped whom we wanted; joining, according to the accident of inclination, the general circle or falling in with a single talker on a convenient sofa? Why were all the sofas so convenient, the accidents so happy, the talkers so ready, the listeners so willing, the subjects presented to you in rotation as quickly foreordained as the courses at dinner? A dearth of topics would have been as unheard of as a lapse in the service. These speculations couldn't fail to lead me to the fundamental truth that Brooksmith had been somehow at the bottom of the mystery. If he hadn't established the salon at least he had carried it on. Brooksmith in short was the artist!

We felt this covertly at the time, without formulating it and were conscious, as an ordered and prosperous community, of his evenhanded justice, all untainted with flunkeyism. He had none of that vulgarity—his touch was infinitely fine. The delicacy of it was clear to me on the first occasion my eyes rested, as they were so often to rest again, on the domestic revealed, in the turbid light of the street, by the opening of the house-door. I saw on the spot that though he had plenty of school he carried it without arrogance—he had remained articulate and human. *L'Ecole Anglaise* Mr. Offord used laughingly to call him when, later on, it happened more than once that we had some conversation about him. But I remember accusing Mr. Offord of not doing him quite ideal justice. That he wasn't one of the giants of the school, however, was admitted by my old friend, who really understood him perfectly and was devoted to him, as I shall show; which doubtless poor Brooksmith had himself felt, to his cost, when his value in the market was originally determined. The utility of his class in general is estimated by the foot and the inch, and poor Brooksmith had only about five feet three to put into circulation. He acknowledged the inadequacy of this provision, and I'm sure was penetrated with the everlasting fitness of the relation between service and stature. If he had been Mr. Offord he certainly would

have found Brooksmith wanting, and indeed the laxity of his employer on this score was one of many things he had had to condone and to which he had at last indulgently adapted himself.

I remember the old man's saying to me : " Oh my servants, if they can live with me a fortnight they can live with me for ever. But it's the first fortnight that tries 'em." It was in the first fortnight for instance that Brooksmith had had to learn that he was exposed to being addressed as " my dear fellow " and " my poor child." Strange and deep must such a probation have been to him, and he doubtless emerged from it tempered and purified. This was written to a certain extent in his appearance ; in his spare brisk little person, in his cloistered white face and extraordinarily polished hair, which told of responsibility, looked as if it were kept up to the same high standard as the plate ; in his small clear anxious eyes, even in the permitted, though not exactly encouraged, tuft on his chin. " He thinks me rather mad, but I've broken him in, and now he likes the place, he likes the company," said the old man. I embraced this fully after I had become aware that Brooksmith's main characteristic was a deep and shy refinement, though I remember I was rather puzzled when, on another occasion, Mr. Offord remarked : " What he likes is the talk—mingling in the conversation." I was conscious I had never seen Brooksmith permit himself this freedom, but I guessed in a moment that what Mr. Offord alluded to was a participation more intense than any speech could have represented—that of being perpetually present on a hundred legitimate pretexts, errands, necessities, and breathing the very atmosphere of criticism, the famous criticism of life. " Quite an education, sir, isn't it, sir ? " he said to me one day at the foot of the stairs when he was letting me out ; and I've always remembered the words and the tone as the first sign of the quickening drama of poor Brooksmith's fate. It was indeed an education, but to what was this sensitive young man of thirty-five, of the servile class, being educated ?

Practically and inevitably, for the time, to companionship, to the perpetual, the even exaggerated reference and appeal of a person brought to dependence by his time of life and his infirmities and always addicted moreover—this was the exaggeration—to the art of giving you pleasure by letting you do things for him. There were certain things Mr. Offord was capable of pretending he liked you to do even when he didn't—this, I mean, if he thought *you* liked them. If it happened that you didn't either—which was rare, yet might be—of course there were cross-

purposes ; but Brooksmith was there to prevent their going very far. This was precisely the way he acted as moderator ; he averted misunderstandings or cleared them up. He had been capable, strange as it may appear, of acquiring for this purpose an insight into the French tongue, which was often used at Mr. Offord's ; for besides being habitual to most of the foreigners, and they were many, who haunted the place or arrived with letters—letters often requiring a little worried consideration, of which Brooksmith always had cognisance—it had really become the primary language of the master of the house. I don't know if all the *malentendus* were in French, but almost all the explanations were, and this didn't a bit prevent Brooksmith's following them. I know Mr. Offord used to read passages to him from Montaigne and Saint-Simon, for he read perpetually when alone—when *they* were alone, that is—and Brooksmith was always about. Perhaps you'll say no wonder Mr. Offord's butler regarded him as "rather mad." However, if I'm not sure what he thought about Montaigne I'm convinced he admired Saint-Simon. A certain feeling for letters must have rubbed off on him from the mere handling of his master's books, which he was always carrying to and fro and putting back in their places.

I often noticed that if an anecdote or a quotation, much more a lively discussion, was going forward, he would, if busy with the fire or the curtains, the lamp or the tea, find a pretext for remaining in the room till the point should be reached. If his purpose was to catch it you weren't discreet, you were in fact scarce human, to call him off, and I shall never forget a look, a hard stony stare—I caught it in its passage—which, one day when there were a good many people in the room, he fastened upon the footman who was helping him in the service and who, in an undertone, had asked him some irrelevant question. It was the only manifestation of harshness I ever observed on Brooksmith's part, and I at first wondered what was the matter. Then I became conscious that Mr. Offord was relating a very curious anecdote, never before perhaps made so public, and imparted to the narrator by an eye-witness of the fact, bearing on Lord Byron's life in Italy. Nothing would induce me to reproduce it here, but Brooksmith had been in danger of losing it. If I ever should venture to reproduce it I shall feel how much I lose in not having my fellow auditor to refer to.

The first day Mr. Offord's door was closed was therefore a dark date in contemporary history. It was raining hard and my umbrella was wet, but Brooksmith received it from me exactly as if this were a preliminary for going upstairs. I observed

however that instead of putting it away he held it poised and trickling over the rug, and I then became aware that he was looking at me with deep acknowledging eyes—his air of universal responsibility. I immediately understood—there was scarce need of question and answer as they passed between us. When I took in that our good friend had given up as never before, though only for the occasion, I exclaimed dolefully : “ What a difference it will make—and to how many people ! ”

“ I shall be one of them, sir ! ” said Brooksmith ; and that was the beginning of the end.

Mr. Offord came down again, but the spell was broken, the great sign being that the conversation was for the first time not directed. It wandered and stumbled, a little frightened, like a lost child—it had let go the nurse’s hand. “ The worst of it is that now we shall talk about my health—*c’est la fin de tout*,” Mr. Offord said when he reappeared ; and then I recognised what a note of change that would be—for he had never tolerated anything so provincial. We “ ran ” to each other’s health as little as to the daily weather. The talk became ours, in a word—not his ; and as ours, even when *he* talked, it could only be inferior. In this form it was a distress to Brooksmith, whose attention now wandered from it altogether : he had so much closer a vision of his master’s intimate conditions than our superficialities represented. There were better hours, and he was more in and out of the room, but I could see he was conscious of the decline, almost of the collapse, of our great institution. He seemed to wish to take counsel with me about it, to feel responsible for its going on in some form or other. When for the second period—the first had lasted several days—he had to tell me that his employer didn’t receive, I half-expected to hear him say after a moment “ Do you think I ought to, sir, in his place ? ”—as he might have asked me, with the return of autumn, if I thought he had better light the drawing-room fire.

He had a resigned philosophic sense of what his guests—our guests, as I came to regard them in our colloquies—would expect. His feeling was that he wouldn’t absolutely have approved of himself as a substitute for Mr. Offord ; but he was so saturated with the religion of habit that he would have made, for our friends, the necessary sacrifice to the divinity. He would take them on a little further and till they could look about them. I think I saw him also mentally confronted with the opportunity to deal—for once in his life—with some of his own dumb preferences, his limitations of sympathy, *weeding* a little in prospect and returning to a purer tradition. It was not unknown to me

that he considered that toward the end of our host's career a certain laxity of selection had crept in.

At last it came to be the case that we all found the closed door more often than the open one ; but even when it was closed Brooksmith managed a crack for me to squeeze through ; so that practically I never turned away without having paid a visit. The difference simply came to be that the visit was to Brooksmith. It took place in the hall, at the familiar foot of the stairs, and we didn't sit down, at least Brooksmith didn't ; moreover it was devoted wholly to one topic and always had the air of being already over—beginning, so to say, at the end. But it was always interesting—it always gave me something to think about. It's true that the subject of my meditation was ever the same—ever “It's all very well, but what *will* become of Brooksmith ? ” Even my private answer to this question left me still unsatisfied. No doubt Mr. Offord would provide for him, but *what* would he provide ?—that was the great point. He couldn't provide society ; and society had become a necessity of Brooksmith's nature. I must add that he never showed a symptom of what I may call sordid solicitude—anxiety on his own account. He was rather livid and intensely grave, as befitted a man before whose eyes the “shade of that which once was great” was passing away. He had the solemnity of a person winding up, under depressing circumstances, a long-established and celebrated business ; he was a kind of social executor or liquidator. But his manner seemed to testify exclusively to the uncertainty of *our* future. I couldn't in those days have afforded it—I lived in two rooms in Jermyn Street and didn't “keep a man” ; but even if my income had permitted I shouldn't have ventured to say to Brooksmith (emulating Mr. Offord) “My dear fellow, I'll take you on.” The whole tone of our intercourse was so much more an implication that it was *I* who should now want a lift. Indeed there was a tacit assurance in Brooksmith's whole attitude that he should have me on his mind.

One of the most assiduous members of our circle had been Lady Kenyon, and I remember his telling me one day that her ladyship had in spite of her own infirmities, lately much aggravated, been in person to inquire. In answer to this I remarked that she would feel it more than any one. Brooksmith had a pause before saying in a certain tone—there's no reproducing some of his tones—“I'll go and see her.” I went to see her myself and learned he had waited on her ; but when I said to her, in the form of a joke but with a core of earnest, that when all was over some of us ought to combine, to club together, and set

Brooksmith up on his own account, she replied a trifle disappointingly : " Do you mean in a public-house ? " I looked at her in a way that I think Brooksmith himself would have approved, and then I answered : " Yes, the Offord Arms." What I had meant of course was that for the love of art itself we ought to look to it that such a peculiar faculty and so much acquired experience shouldn't be wasted. I really think that if we had caused a few black-edged cards to be struck off and circulated—" Mr. Brooksmith will continue to receive on the old premises from four to seven ; business carried on as usual during the alterations"—the greater number of us would have rallied.

Several times he took me upstairs—always by his own proposal—and our dear old friend, in bed (in a curious flowered and brocaded casaque which made him, especially as his head was tied up in a handkerchief to match, look, to my imagination, like the dying Voltair^e) held for ten minutes a sadly shrunken little salon. I felt indeed each time as if I were attending the last *coucher* of some social sovereign. He was royally whimsical about his sufferings and not at all concerned—quite as if the Constitution provided for the case—about his successor. He glided over *our* sufferings charmingly, and none of his jokes—it was a gallant abstention, some of them would have been so easy—were at our expense. Now and again, I confess, there was one at Brooksmith's, but so pathetically sociable as to make the excellent man look at me in a way that seemed to say : " Do exchange a glance with me, or I shan't be able to stand it." What he wasn't able to stand was not what Mr. Offord said about him, but what he wasn't able to say in return. His idea of conversation for himself was giving you the convenience of speaking to him ; and when he went to " see " Lady Kenyon for instance it was to carry her the tribute of his receptive silence. Where would the speech of his betters have been if proper service had been a manifestation of sound ? In that case the fundamental difference would have had to be shown by *their* dumbness, and many of them, poor things, were dumb enough without that provision. Brooksmith took an unfailing interest in the preservation of the fundamental difference ; it was the thing he had most on his conscience.

What had become of it however when Mr. Offord passed away like any inferior person—was relegated to eternal stillness after the manner of a butler above-stairs ? His aspect on the event—for the several successive days—may be imagined, and the multiplication by funereal observance of the things he didn't say. When everything was over—it was late the same day—I knocked

at the door of the house of mourning as I so often had done before. I could never call on Mr. Offord again, but I had come literally to call on Brooksmith. I wanted to ask him if there was anything I could do for him, tainted with vagueness as this enquiry could only be. My presumptuous dream of taking him into my own service had died away : my service wasn't worth his being taken into. My offer could only be to help him to find another place, and yet there was an indelicacy, as it were, in taking for granted that his thoughts would immediately be fixed on another. I had a hope that he would be able to give his life a different form—though certainly not the form, the frequent result of such bereavements, of his setting up a little shop. That would have been dreadful ; for I should have wished to forward any enterprise he might embark in, yet how could I have brought myself to go and pay him shillings and take back coppers over a counter ? My visit then was simply an intended compliment. He took it as such, gratefully and with all the tact in the world. He knew I really couldn't help him and that I knew he knew I couldn't ; but we discussed the situation—with a good deal of elegant generality—at the foot of the stairs, in the hall already dismantled, where I had so often discussed other situations with him. The executors were in possession, as was still more apparent when he made me pass for a few minutes into the dining-room, where various objects were muffled up for removal.

Two definite facts, however, he had to communicate ; one being that he was to leave the house for ever that night (servants, for some mysterious reason, seem always to depart by night), and the other—he mentioned it only at the last and with hesitation—that he was already aware his late master had left him a legacy of eighty pounds. “ I'm very glad,” I said, and Brooksmith was of the same mind : “ It was so like him to think of me.” This was all that passed between us on the subject, and I know nothing of his judgement of Mr. Offord's memento. Eighty pounds are always eighty pounds, and no one has ever left *me* an equal sum ; but, all the same, for Brooksmith, I was disappointed. I don't know what I had expected, but it was almost a shock. Eighty pounds might stock a small shop—a *very* small shop ; but, I repeat, I couldn't bear to think of that. I asked my friend if he had been able to save a little, and he replied : “ No, sir, I've had to do things.” I didn't enquire what things they might have been ; they were his own affair, and I took his word for them as assentingly as if he had the greatness of an ancient house to keep up ; especially as there was something in his manner that seemed to convey a prospect of further sacrifice.

"I shall have to turn round a bit, sir—I shall have to look about me," he said ; and then he added indulgently, magnanimously : " If you should happen to hear of anything for me——

I couldn't let him finish ; this was, in its essence, too much in the really grand manner. It would be a help to my getting him off my mind to be able to pretend I *could* find the right place, and that help he wished to give me, for it was doubtless painful to him to see me in so false a position. I interposed with a few words to the effect of how well aware I was that wherever he should go, whatever he should do, he would miss our old friend terribly—miss him even more than I should, having been with him so much more. This led him to make the speech that has remained with me as the very text of the whole episode.

" Oh sir, it's sad for *you*, very sad indeed, and for a great many gentlemen and ladies ; that it is, sir. But for me, sir, it is, if I may say so, still graver even than that ; it's just the loss of something that was everything. For me, sir," he went on with rising tears, " he was just *all*, if you know what I mean, sir. You have others, sir, I dare say—not that I would have you understand me to speak of them as in any way tantamount. But you have the pleasures of society, sir ; if it's only in talking about him, sir, as I dare say you do freely—for all his blest memory has to fear from it—with gentlemen and ladies who have had the same honour. That's not for me, sir, and I've to keep my associations to myself. Mr. Offord was *my* society, and now, you see, I just haven't any. You go back to conversation, sir, after all, and I go back to my place," Brooksmith stammered, without exaggerated irony or dramatic bitterness, but with a flat unstudied veracity and his hand on the knob of the street-door. He turned it to let me out and then he added : " I just go downstairs, sir, again, and I stay there."

" My poor child," I replied in my emotion, quite as Mr. Offord used to speak, " my dear fellow, leave it to me : *we'll* look after you, we'll all do something for you."

" Ah if you could give me some one *like* him ! But there ain't two such in the world," Brooksmith said as we parted.

He had given me his address—the place where he would be to be heard of. For a long time I had no occasion to make use of the information : he proved on trial so very difficult a case. The people who knew him and had known Mr. Offord didn't want to take him, and yet I couldn't bear to try to thrust him among strangers—strangers to his past when not to his present. I spoke to many of our old friends about him and found them all governed by the odd mixture of feelings of which I myself

was conscious—as well as disposed, further, to entertain a suspicion that he was “spoiled,” with which I then would have nothing to do. In plain terms a certain embarrassment, a sensible awkwardness when they thought of it, attached to the idea of using him as a menial : they had met him so often in society. Many of them would have asked him, and did ask him, or rather did ask me to ask him, to come and see them ; but a mere visiting-list was not what I wanted for him. He was too short for people who were very particular ; nevertheless I heard of an opening in a diplomatic household which led me to write him a note, though I was looking much less for something grand than for something human. Five days later I heard from him. The secretary’s wife had decided, after keeping him waiting till then, that she couldn’t take a servant out of a house in which there hadn’t been a lady. The note had a P.S. : “ It’s a good job there wasn’t, sir, such a lady as some.”

A week later he came to see me and told me he was “suited,” committed to some highly respectable people—they were something quite immense in the City—who lived on the Bayswater side of the Park. “ I dare say it will be rather poor, sir,” he admitted ; “ but I’ve seen the fireworks, haven’t I, sir ?—it can’t be fireworks *every* night. After Mansfield Street there ain’t much choice.” There was a certain amount, however, it seemed ; for the following year, calling one day on a country cousin, a lady of a certain age who was spending a fortnight in town with some friends of her own, a family unknown to me and resident in Chester Square, the door of the house was opened, to my surprise and gratification, by Brooksmith in person. When I came out I had some conversation with him from which I gathered that he had found the large City people too dull for endurance, and I guessed, though he didn’t say it, that he had found them vulgar as well. I don’t know what judgement he would have passed on his actual patrons if my relative hadn’t been their friend ; but in view of that connection he abstained from comment.

None was necessary, however, for before the lady in question brought her visit to a close they honoured me with an invitation to dinner, which I accepted. There was a largish party on the occasion, but I confess I thought of Brooksmith rather more than of the seated company. They required no depth of attention—they were all referable to usual irredeemable inevitable types. It was the world of cheerful commonplace and conscious gentility and prosperous density, a full-fed material, insular world, a world of hideous florid plate and ponderous order and thin conversation.

There wasn't a word said about Byron, or even about a minor bard then much in view. Nothing would have induced me to look at Brooksmith in the course of the repast, and I felt sure that not even my overturning the wine would have induced him to meet my eye. We were in intellectual sympathy—we felt, as regards each other, a degree of social responsibility. In short we had been in Arcadia together, and we had both come to *this* ! No wonder we were ashamed to be confronted. When he had helped on my overcoat, as I was going away, we parted, for the first time since the earliest days of Mansfield Street, in silence. I thought he looked lean and wasted, and I guessed that his new place wasn't more "human" than his previous one. There was plenty of beef and beer, but there was no reciprocity. The question for him to have asked before accepting the position wouldn't have been "How many footmen are kept?" but "How much imagination?"

The next time I went to the house—I confess it wasn't very soon—I encountered his successor, a personage who evidently enjoyed the good fortune of never having quitted his natural level. Could any be higher? he seemed to ask—over the heads of three footmen and even of some visitors. He made me feel as if Brooksmith were dead; but I didn't dare to enquire—I couldn't have borne his "I haven't the least idea, sir." I dispatched a note to the address that worthy had given me after Mr. Offord's death, but I received no answer. Six months later however I was favoured with a visit from an elderly dreary dingy person who introduced herself to me as Mr. Brooksmith's aunt and from whom I learned that he was out of place and out of health and had allowed her to come and say to me that if I could spare half an hour to look in at him he would take it as a rare honour.

I went the next day—his messenger had given me a new address—and found my friend lodged in a short sordid street in Marylebone, one of those corners of London that wear the last expression of sickly meanness. The room into which I was shown was above the small establishment of a dyer and cleaner who had inflated kid gloves and discoloured shawls in his shop-front. There was a great deal of grimy infant life up and down the place, and there was a hot moist smell within, as of the "boiling" of dirty linen. Brooksmith sat with a blanket over his legs at a clean little window where, from behind stiff bluish-white curtains, he could look across at a huckster's and a tin-smith's and a small greasy public-house. He had passed through an illness and was convalescent, and his mother, as well as his

aunt, was in attendance on him. I liked the nearer relative, who was bland and intensely humble, but I had my doubts of the remoter, whom I connected perhaps unjustly with the opposite public-house—she seemed somehow greasy with the same grease—and whose furtive eyes followed every movement of my hand as if to see if it weren't going into my pocket. It didn't take this direction—I couldn't, unsolicited, put myself at that sort of ease with Brooksmith. Several times the door of the room opened and mysterious old women peeped in and shuffled back again. I don't know who they were ; poor Brooksmith seemed encompassed with vague prying beery females.

He was vague himself, and evidently weak, and much embarrassed, and not an allusion was made between us to Mansfield Street. The vision of the salon of which he had been an ornament hovered before me however, by contrast, sufficiently. He assured me he was really getting better, and his mother remarked that he would come round if he could only get his spirits up. The aunt echoed this opinion, and I became more sure that in her own case she knew where to go for such a purpose. I'm afraid I was rather weak with my old friend, for I neglected the opportunity, so exceptionally good, to rebuke the levity which had led him to throw up honourable positions—fine stiff steady berths in Bayswater and Belgravia, with morning prayers, as I knew, attached to one of them. Very likely his reasons had been profane and sentimental ; he didn't want morning prayers, he wanted to be somebody's dear fellow ; but I couldn't be the person to rebuke him. He shuffled these episodes out of sight—I saw he had no wish to discuss them. I noted further, strangely enough, that it would probably be a questionable pleasure for him to see me again : he doubted now even of my power to condone his aberrations. He didn't wish to have to explain ; and his behaviour was likely in future to need explanation. When I bade him farewell he looked at me a moment with eyes that said everything : “ How can I talk about those exquisite years in this place, before these people, with the old women poking their heads in ? It was very good of you to come to see me ; it wasn't my idea—*she* brought you. We've said everything ; it's over ; you'll lose all patience with me, and I'd rather you shouldn't see the rest.” I sent him some money in a letter the next day, but I saw the rest only in the light of a barren sequel.

A whole year after my visit to him I became aware once, in dining out, that Brooksmith was one of the several servants who hovered behind our chairs. He hadn't opened the door of the house to me, nor had I recognised him in the array of retainers

in the hall. This time I tried to catch his eye, but he never gave me a chance, and when he handed me a dish I could only be careful to thank him audibly. Indeed I partook of two *entrées* of which I had my doubts, subsequently converted into certainties, in order not to snub him. He looked well enough in health, but much older, and wore in an exceptionally marked degree the glazed and expressionless mask of the British domestic *de race*. I saw with dismay that if I hadn't known him I should have taken him, on the showing of his countenance, for an extravagant illustration of irresponsible servile gloom. I said to myself that he had become a reactionary, gone over to the Philistines, thrown himself into religion, the religion of his "place," like a foreign lady *sur le retour*. I divined moreover that he was only engaged for the evening—he had become a mere waiter, had joined the band of the white-waistcoated who "go out." There was something pathetic in this fact—it was a terrible vulgarisation of Brooksmith. It was the mercenary prose of butlerhood ; he had given up the struggle for the poetry. If reciprocity was what he had missed where was the reciprocity now ? Only in the bottoms of the wine-glasses and the five shillings—or whatever they get—clapped into his hand by the permanent man. However, I supposed he had taken up a precarious branch of his profession because it after all sent him less downstairs. His relations with London society were more superficial, but they were of course more various. As I went away on this occasion I looked out for him eagerly among the four or five attendants whose perpendicular persons, fluting the walls of London passages, are supposed to lubricate the process of departure ; but he was not on duty. I asked one of the others if he were not in the house, and received the prompt answer : "Just left, sir. Anything I can do for you, sir ?" I wanted to say "Please give him my kind regards" ; but I abstained—I didn't want to compromise him ; and I never came across him again.

Often and often, in dining out, I looked for him, sometimes accepting invitations on purpose to multiply the chances of my meeting him. But always in vain ; so that as I met many other members of the casual class over and over again I at last adopted the theory that he always procured a list of expected guests beforehand and kept away from the banquets which he thus learned I was to grace. At last I gave up hope, and one day at the end of three years I received another visit from his aunt. She was drearier and dingier, almost squalid, and she was in great tribulation and want. Her sister, Mrs. Brooksmith, had been dead a year, and three months later her nephew had dis-

appeared. He had always looked after her a bit—since her troubles ; I never knew what her troubles had been—and now she hadn't so much as a petticoat to pawn. She had also a niece, to whom she had been everything before her troubles, but the niece had treated her most shameful. These were details ; the great and romantic fact was Brooksmith's final evasion of his fate. He had gone out to wait one evening as usual, in a white waistcoat she had done up for him with her own hands—being due at a large party up Kensington way. But he had never come home again and had never arrived at the large party, nor at any party that any one could make out. No trace of him had come to light—no gleam of the white waistcoat had pierced the obscurity of his doom. This news was a sharp shock to me, for I had my ideas about his real destination. His aged relative had promptly, as she said, guessed the worst. Somehow and somewhere he had got out of the way altogether, and now I trust that, with characteristic deliberation, he is changing the plates of the immortal gods. As my depressing visitant also said, he never *had* got his spirits up. I was fortunately able to dismiss her with her own somewhat improved. But the dim ghost of poor Brooksmith is one of those that I see. He had indeed been spoiled.

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

I

HE had been told the ladies were at church, but this was corrected by what he saw from the top of the steps—they descended from a great height in two arms, with a circular sweep of the most charming effect—at the threshold of the door which, from the long bright gallery, overlooked the immense lawn. Three gentlemen, on the grass, at a distance, sat under the great trees, while the fourth figure showed a crimson dress that told as a “bit of colour” amid the fresh rich green. The servant had so far accompanied Paul Overt as to introduce him to this view, after asking him if he wished first to go to his room. The young man declined that privilege conscious of no disrepair from so short and easy a journey and always liking to take at once a general perceptive possession of a new scene. He stood there a little with his eyes on the group and on the admirable picture, the wide grounds of an old country-house near London—that only made it better—on a splendid Sunday in June. “But that lady, who’s *she*?” he said to the servant before the man left him.

“I think she’s Mrs. St. George, sir.”

“Mrs. St. George, the wife of the distinguished—” Then Paul Overt checked himself, doubting if a footman would know.

“Yes, sir—probably, sir,” said his guide, who appeared to wish to intimate that a person staying at Summersoft would naturally be, if only by alliance, distinguished. His tone, however, made poor Overt himself feel for the moment scantily so.

“And the gentleman?” Overt went on.

“Well, sir, one of them’s General Fancourt.”

“Ah yes, I know; thank you.” General Fancourt was distinguished, there was no doubt of that, for something he had done, or perhaps even hadn’t done—the young man couldn’t remember which—some years before in India. The servant went away, leaving the glass doors open into the gallery, and Paul Overt remained at the head of the wide double staircase, saying to himself that the place was sweet and promised a pleasant visit, while he leaned on the balustrade of fine old ironwork which, like all the other details, was of the same period as the house. It all went together and spoke in one voice—a rich English voice of the early part of the eighteenth century. It might have been

church-time on a summer's day in the reign of Queen Anne ; the stillness was too perfect to be modern, the nearness counted so as distance, and there was something so fresh and sound in the originality of the large smooth house, the expanse of beautiful brickwork that showed for pink rather than red and that had been kept clear of messy creepers by the law under which a woman with a rare complexion disdains a veil. When Paul Overt became aware that the people under the trees had noticed him he turned back through the open doors into the great gallery which was the pride of the place. It marched across from end to end and seemed—with its bright colours, its high panelled windows, its faded flowered chintzes, its quickly-recognised portraits and pictures, the blue-and-white china of its cabinets and the attenuated festoons and rosettes of its ceiling—a cheerful upholstered avenue into the other century.

Our friend was slightly nervous ; that went with his character as a student of fine prose, went with the artist's general disposition to vibrate ; and there was a particular thrill in the idea that Henry St. George might be a member of the party. For the young aspirant he had remained a high literary figure, in spite of the lower range of production to which he had fallen after his first three great successes, the comparative absence of quality in his later work. There had been moments when Paul Overt almost shed tears for this ; but now that he was near him—he had never met him—he was conscious only of the fine original source and of his own immense debt. After he had taken a turn or two up and down the gallery he came out again and descended the steps. He was but slenderly supplied with a certain social boldness—it was really a weakness in him—so that, conscious of a want of acquaintance with the four persons in the distance, he gave way to motions recommended by their not committing him to a positive approach. There was a fine English awkwardness in this—he felt that too as he sauntered vaguely and obliquely across the lawn, taking an independent line. Fortunately there was an equally fine English directness in the way one of the gentlemen presently rose and made as if to “stalk” him, though with an air of conciliation and reassurance. To this demonstration Paul Overt instantly responded, even if the gentleman were not his host. He was tall, straight and elderly and had, like the great house itself, a pink smiling face, and into the bargain a white moustache. Our young man met him halfway while he laughed and said : “Er—Lady Watermouth told us you were coming ; she asked me just to look after you.” Paul Overt thanked him, liking him on the spot, and turned round with him to walk toward the others. “They’ve

all gone to church—all except us," the stranger continued as they went ; " we're just sitting here—it's so jolly." Overt pronounced it jolly indeed : it was such a lovely place. He mentioned that he was having the charming impression for the first time.

" Ah you've not been here before ? " said his companion. " It's a nice little place—not much to *do*, you know." Overt wondered what he wanted to " do "—he felt that he himself was doing so much. By the time they came to where the others sat he had recognised his initiator for a military man and—such was the turn of Overt's imagination—had found him thus still more sympathetic. He would naturally have a need for action, for deeds at variance with the pacific pastoral scene. He was evidently so good-natured, however, that he accepted the inglorious hour for what it was worth. Paul Overt shared it with him and with his companions for the next twenty minutes ; the latter looked at him and he looked at them without knowing much who they were, while the talk went on without much telling him even what it meant. It seemed indeed to mean nothing in particular ; it wandered, with casual pointless pauses and short terrestrial flights, amid names of persons and places—names which, for our friend, had no great power of evocation. It was all sociable and slow, as was right and natural of a warm Sunday morning.

His first attention was given to the question, privately considered, of whether one of the two younger men would be Henry St. George. He knew many of his distinguished contemporaries by their photographs, but had never, as happened, seen a portrait of the great misguided novelist. One of the gentlemen was unimaginable—he was too young ; and the other scarcely looked clever enough, with such mild indiscriminating eyes. If those eyes were St. George's the problem presented by the ill-matched parts of his genius would be still more difficult of solution. Besides, the deportment of their proprietor was not, as regards the lady in the red dress, such as could be natural, toward the wife of his bosom, even to a writer accused by several critics of sacrificing too much to manner. Lastly Paul Overt had a vague sense that if the gentleman with the expressionless eyes bore the name that had set his heart beating faster (he also had contradictory conventional whiskers—the young admirer of the celebrity had never in a mental vision seen *his* face in so vulgar a frame) he would have given him a sign of recognition or of friendliness, would have heard of him a little, would know something about " Ginistrella," would have an impression of how that fresh fiction had caught the eye of real criticism. Paul Overt had a dread of being grossly proud,¹ but even morbid modesty might view the

authorship of "Ginistrella" as constituting a degree of identity. His soldierly friend became clear enough : he was "Fancourt," but was also "the General" ; and he mentioned to the new visitor in the course of a few moments that he had but lately returned from twenty years' service abroad.

"And now you remain in England?" the young man asked.

"Oh yes ; I've bought a small house in London."

"And I hope you like it," said Overt, looking at Mrs. St. George.

"Well, a little house in Manchester Square—there's a limit to the enthusiasm *that* inspires."

"Oh I meant being at home again—being back in Piccadilly."

"My daughter likes Piccadilly—that's the main thing. She's very fond of art and music and literature and all that kind of thing. She missed it in India and she finds it in London, or she hopes she'll find it. Mr. St. George has promised to help her—he has been awfully kind to her. She has gone to church—she's fond of that too—but they'll all be back in a quarter of an hour. You must let me introduce you to her—she'll be so glad to know you. I dare say she has read every blest word you've written."

"I shall be delighted—I haven't written so very many," Overt pleaded, feeling, and without resentment, that the General at least was vagueness itself about that. But he wondered a little why, expressing this friendly disposition, it didn't occur to the doubtless eminent soldier to pronounce the word that would put him in relation with Mrs. St. George. If it was a question of introductions Miss Fancourt—apparently as yet unmarried—was far away, while the wife of his illustrious confrère was almost between them. This lady struck Paul Overt as altogether pretty, with a surprising juvenility and a high smartness of aspect, something that—he could scarcely have said why—served for mystification. St. George certainly had every right to a charming wife, but he himself would never have imagined the important little woman in the aggressively Parisian dress the partner for life, the *alter ego*, of a man of letters. That partner in general, he knew, that second self, was far from presenting herself in a single type : observation had taught him that she was not inveterately, not necessarily plain. But he had never before seen her look so much as if her prosperity had deeper foundations than an ink-spotted study-table littered with proof-sheets. Mrs. St. George might have been the wife of a gentleman who "kept" books rather than wrote them, who carried on great affairs in the City and made better bargains than those that poets mostly make with publishers. With this she hinted at a success more personal—a success

peculiarly stamping the age in which society, the world of conversation, is a great drawing-room with the City for its ante-chamber. Overt numbered her years at first as some thirty, and then ended by believing that she might approach her fiftieth. But she somehow in this case juggled away the excess and the difference—you only saw them in a rare glimpse, like the rabbit in the conjurer's sleeve. She was extraordinarily white, and her every element and item was pretty ; her eyes, her ears, her hair, her voice, her hands, her feet—to which her relaxed attitude in her wicker chair gave a great publicity—and the numerous ribbons and trinkets with which she was bedecked. She looked as if she had put on her best clothes to go to church and then had decided they were too good for that and had stayed at home. She told a story of some length about the shabby way Lady Jane had treated the Duchess, as well as an anecdote in relation to a purchase she had made in Paris—on her way back from Cannes ; made for Lady Egbert, who had never refunded the money. Paul Overt suspected her of a tendency to figure great people as larger than life, until he noticed the manner in which she handled Lady Egbert, which was so sharply mutinous that it reassured him. He felt he should have understood her better if he might have met her eye ; but she scarcely so much as glanced at him. “ Ah here they come—all the good ones ! ” she said at last ; and Paul Overt admired at his distance the return of the church-goers—several persons, in couples and threes, advancing in a flicker of sun and shade at the end of a large green vista formed by the level grass and the overarching boughs.

“ If you mean to imply that *we're* bad, I protest,” said one of the gentlemen—“ after making one's self agreeable all the morning ! ”

“ Ah if they've found you agreeable—! ” Mrs. St. George gaily cried. “ But if we're good the others are better.”

“ They must be angels then,” said the amused General.

“ Your husband was an angel, the way he went off at your bidding,” the gentleman who had first spoken declared to Mrs. St. George.

“ At my bidding ? ”

“ Didn't you make him go to church ? ”

“ I never made him do anything in my life but once—when I made him burn up a bad book. That's all ! ” At her “ That's all ! ” our young friend broke into an irrepressible laugh ; it lasted only a second, but it drew her eyes to him. His own met them, though not long enough to help him to understand her ; unless it were a step towards this that he saw on the instant how

the burnt book—the way she alluded to it!—would have been one of her husband's finest things.

"A bad book?" her interlocutor repeated.

"I didn't like it. He went to church because your daughter went," she continued to General Fancourt. "I think it my duty to call your attention to his extraordinary demonstrations to your daughter."

"Well, if you don't mind them I don't," the General laughed.

"*Il s'attache à ses pas*. But I don't wonder—she's so charming."

"I hope she won't make him burn any books!" Paul Overt ventured to exclaim.

"If she'd make him write a few it would be more to the purpose," said Mrs. St. George. "He has been of a laziness of late—!"

Our young man stared—he was so struck with the lady's phraseology. Her "write a few" seemed to him almost as good as her "That's all." Didn't she, as the wife of a rare artist, know what it was to produce *one* perfect work of art? How in the world did she think they were turned off? His private conviction was that, admirably as Henry St. George wrote, he had written for the last ten years, and especially for the last five, only too much, and there was an instant during which he felt inwardly solicited to make this public. But before he had spoken a diversion was effected by the return of the absentees. They strolled up dispersedly—there were eight or ten of them—and the circle under the trees rearranged itself as they took their place in it. They made it much larger, so that Paul Overt could feel—he was always feeling that sort of thing, as he said to himself—that if the company had already been interesting to watch the interest would now become intense. He shook hands with his hostess, who welcomed him without many words, in the manner of a woman able to trust him to understand and conscious that so pleasant an occasion would in every way speak for itself. She offered him no particular facility for sitting by her, and when they had all subsided again he found himself still next General Fancourt, with an unknown lady on his other flank.

"That's my daughter—that one opposite," the General said to him without loss of time. Overt saw a tall girl, with magnificent red hair, in a dress of a pretty grey-green tint and of a limp silken texture, a garment that clearly shirked every modern effect. It had therefore somehow the stamp of the latest thing, so that our beholder quickly took her for nothing if not contemporaneous.

"She's very handsome—very handsome," he repeated while

he considered her. There was something noble in her head, and she appeared fresh and strong.

Her good father surveyed her with complacency, remarking soon : " She looks too hot—that's her walk. But she'll be all right presently. Then I'll make her come over and speak to you."

" I should be sorry to give you that trouble. If you were to take me over *there*—!" the young man murmured.

" My dear sir, do you suppose I put myself out that way? I don't mean for you, but for Marian," the General added.

" I would put myself out for her soon enough," Overt replied ; after which he went on : " Will you be so good as to tell me which of those gentlemen is Henry St. George? "

" The fellow talking to my girl. By Jove, he *is* making up to her—they're going off for another walk."

" Ah is that he—really? " Our friend felt a certain surprise, for the personage before him seemed to trouble a vision which had been vague only while not confronted with the reality. As soon as the reality dawned the mental image, retiring with a sigh, became substantial enough to suffer a slight wrong. Overt, who had spent a considerable part of his short life in foreign lands, made now, but not for the first time, the reflection that whereas in those countries he had almost always recognised the artist and the man of letters by his personal " type," the mould of his face, the character of his head, the expression of his figure and even the indications of his dress, so in England this identification was as little as possible a matter of course, thanks to the greater conformity, the habit of sinking the profession instead of advertising it, the general diffusion of the air of the gentleman—the gentleman committed to no particular set of ideas. More than once, on returning to his own country, he had said to himself about the people met in society : " One sees them in this place and that, and one even talks with them ; but to find out what they *do* one would really have to be a detective." In respect to several individuals whose work he was the opposite of " drawn to"—perhaps he was wrong—he found himself adding " No wonder they conceal it—when it's so bad! " He noted that oftener than in France and in Germany his artist looked like a gentleman—that is like an English one—while, certainly outside a few exceptions, his gentleman didn't look like an artist. St. George was not one of the exceptions ; that circumstance he definitely apprehended before the great man had turned his back to walk off with Miss Fancourt. He certainly looked better behind than any foreign man of letters—showed for beautifully correct in his tall black hat and his superior frock coat. Somehow,

all the same, these very garments—he wouldn't have minded them so much on a weekday—were disconcerting to Paul Overt, who forgot for the moment that the head of the profession was not a bit better dressed than himself. He had caught a glimpse of a regular face, a fresh colour, a brown moustache and a pair of eyes surely never visited by a fine frenzy, and he promised himself to study these denotements on the first occasion. His superficial sense was that their owner might have passed for a lucky stock-broker—a gentleman driving eastward every morning from a sanitary suburb in a smart dog-cart. That carried out the impression already derived from his wife. Paul's glance, after a moment, travelled back to this lady, and he saw how her own had followed her husband as he moved off with Miss Fancourt. Overt permitted himself to wonder a little if she were jealous when another woman took him away. Then he made out that Mrs. St. George wasn't glaring at the indifferent maiden. Her eyes rested but on her husband, and with unmistakable serenity. That was the way she wanted him to be—she liked his conventional uniform. Overt longed to hear more about the book she had induced him to destroy.

2

As they all came out from luncheon General Fancourt took hold of him with an "I say, I want you to know my girl!" as if the idea had just occurred to him and he hadn't spoken of it before. With the other hand he possessed himself all paternally of the young lady. "You know all about him. I've seen you with his books. She reads everything—everything!" he went on to Paul. The girl smiled at him and then laughed at her father. The General turned away and his daughter spoke—"Isn't papa delightful?"

"He is indeed, Miss Fancourt."

"As if I read you because I read 'everything'!"

"Oh I don't mean for saying that," said Paul Overt. "I liked him from the moment he began to be kind to me. Then he promised me this privilege."

"It isn't for you he means it—it's for me. If you flatter yourself that he thinks of anything in life but me you'll find you're mistaken. He introduces every one. He thinks me insatiable."

"You speak just like him," laughed our youth.

"Ah but sometimes I want to"—and the girl coloured. "I don't read everything—I read very little." But I *have* read you."

"Suppose we go into the gallery," said Paul Overt. She pleased him greatly, not so much because of this last remark—though that of course was not too disconcerting—as because, seated opposite to him at luncheon, she had given him for half an hour the impression of her beautiful face. Something else had come with it—a sense of generosity, of an enthusiasm which, unlike many enthusiasms, was not all manner. That was not spoiled for him by his seeing that the repast had placed her again in familiar contact with Henry St. George. Sitting next her this celebrity was also opposite our young man, who had been able to note that he multiplied the attentions lately brought by his wife to the General's notice. Paul Overt had gathered as well that this lady was not in the least discomposed by these fond excesses and that she gave every sign of an unclouded spirit. She had Lord Masham on one side of her and on the other the accomplished Mr. Mulliner, editor of the new high-class lively evening paper which was expected to meet a want felt in circles increasingly conscious that Conservatism must be made amusing, and unconvinced when assured by those of another political colour that it was already amusing enough. At the end of an hour spent in her company Paul Overt thought her still prettier than at the first radiation, and if her profane allusions to her husband's work had not still rung in his ears he should have liked her—so far as it could be a question of that in connection with a woman to whom he had not yet spoken and to whom probably he should never speak if it were left to her. Pretty women were a clear need to this genius, and for the hour it was Miss Fancourt who supplied the want. If Overt had promised himself a closer view the occasion was now of the best, and it brought consequences felt by the young man as important. He saw more in St. George's face, which he liked the better for its not having told its whole story in the first three minutes. That story came out as one read, in short instalments—it was excusable that one's analogies should be somewhat professional—and the text was a style considerably involved, a language not easy to translate at sight. There were shades of meaning in it and a vague perspective of history which receded as you advanced. Two facts Paul had particularly heeded. The first of these was that he liked the measured mask much better at inscrutable rest than in social agitation; its almost convulsive smile above all displeased him (as much as any impression from that source could), whereas the quiet face had a charm that grew in proportion as stillness settled again. The change to the expression of gaiety excited, he made out, very much the private protest of a person sitting

gratefully in the twilight when the lamp is brought in too soon. His second reflection was that, though generally averse to the flagrant use of ingratiating arts by a man of age "making up" to a pretty girl, he was not in this case too painfully affected : which seemed to prove either that St. George had a light hand or the air of being younger than he was, or else that Miss Fancourt's own manner somehow made everything right.

Overt walked with her into the gallery, and they strolled to the end of it, looking at the pictures, the cabinets, the charming vista, which harmonised with the prospect of the summer afternoon, resembling it by a long brightness, with great divans and old chairs that figured hours of rest. Such a place as that had the added merit of giving those who came into it plenty to talk about. Miss Fancourt sat down with her new acquaintance on a flowered sofa, the cushions of which, very numerous, were tight ancient cubes of many sizes, and presently said : " I'm so glad to have a chance to thank you."

" To thank me— ? " He had to wonder.

" I liked your book so much. I think it splendid."

She sat there smiling at him, and he never asked himself which book she meant ; for after all he had written three or four. That seemed a vulgar detail, and he wasn't even gratified by the idea of the pleasure she told him—her handsome bright face told him—he had given her. The feeling she appealed to, or at any rate the feeling she excited, was something larger, something that had little to do with any quickened pulsation of his own vanity. It was responsive admiration of the life she embodied, the young purity and richness of which appeared to imply that real success was to resemble *that*, to live, to bloom, to present the perfection of a fine type, not to have hammered out headachy fancies with a bent back at an ink-stained table. While her grey eyes rested on him—there was a widish space between these, and the division of her rich-coloured hair, so thick that it ventured to be smooth, made a free arch above them—he was almost ashamed of that exercise of the pen which it was her present inclination to commend. He was conscious he should have liked better to please her in some other way. The lines of her face were those of a woman grown, but the child lingered on in her complexion and in the sweetness of her mouth. Above all she was natural—that was indubitable now ; more natural than he had supposed at first, perhaps on account of her esthetic toggery, which was conventionally unconventional, suggesting what he might have called a tortuous spontaneity. He had feared that sort of thing in other cases, and his fears had been justified ; for, though he

was an artist to the essence, the modern reactionary nymph, with the brambles of the woodland caught in her folds and a look as if the satyrs had toyed with her hair, made him shrink not as a man of starch and patent leather, but as a man potentially himself a poet or even a faun. The girl was really more candid than her costume, and the best proof of it was her supposing her liberal character suited by any uniform. This was a fallacy, since if she was draped as a pessimist he was sure she liked the taste of life. He thanked her for her appreciation—aware at the same time that he didn't appear to thank her enough and that she might think him ungracious. He was afraid she would ask him to explain something he had written, and he always winced at that—perhaps too timidly—for to his own ear the explanation of a work of art sounded fatuous. But he liked her so much as to feel a confidence that in the long run he should be able to show her he wasn't rudely evasive. Moreover she surely wasn't quick to take offence, wasn't irritable; she could be trusted to wait. So when he said to her, "Ah, don't talk of anything I've done, don't talk of it *here*; there's another man in the house who's the actuality!"—when he uttered this short sincere protest it was with the sense that she would see in the words neither mock humility nor the impatience of a successful man bored with praise.

"You mean Mr. St. George—isn't he delightful?"

Paul Overt met her eyes, which had a cool morning-light that would have half-broken his heart if he hadn't been so young. "Alas I don't know him. I only admire him at a distance."

"Oh you *must* know him—he wants so to talk to you," returned Miss Fancourt, who evidently had the habit of saying the things that, by her quick calculation, would give people pleasure. Paul saw how she would always calculate on everything's being simple between others.

"I shouldn't have supposed he knew anything about me," he professed.

"He does then—everything. And if he didn't I should be able to tell him."

"To tell him everything?" our friend smiled.

"You talk just like the people in your book!" she answered.

"Then they must all talk alike."

She thought a moment, not a bit disconcerted. "Well, it must be so difficult. Mr. St. George tells me it *is*—terribly. I've tried too—and I find it so. I've tried to write a novel."

"Mr. St. George oughtn't to discourage you," Paul went so far as to say.

"You do much *more*—when you wear that expression."

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

"Well, after all, why try to be an artist?" the young man pursued. "It's so poor—so poor!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Miss Fancourt, who looked grave.

"I mean as compared with being a person of action—as living your works."

"But what's art but an intense life—if it be real?" she asked. "I think it's the only one—everything else is so clumsy!" Her companion laughed and she brought out with her charming serenity what next struck her. "It's so interesting to meet so many celebrated people."

"So I should think—but surely it isn't new to you."

"Why I've never seen any one—any one: living always in Asia."

The way she talked of Asia somehow enchanted him. "But doesn't that continent swarm with great figures? Haven't you administered provinces in India and had captive rajahs and tributary princes chained to your car?"

It was as if she didn't care even *should* he amuse himself at her cost. "I was with my father after I left school to go out there. It was delightful being with him—we're alone together in the world he and I—but there was none of the society I like best. One never heard of a picture—never of a book except bad ones."

"Never of a picture? Why, wasn't all life a picture?"

She looked over the delightful place where they sat. "Nothing to compare to this. I adore England!" she cried.

It fairly stirred in him the sacred chord. "Ah of course I don't deny that we must do something with her, poor old dear, yet."

"She hasn't been touched, really," said the girl.

"Did Mr. St. George say that?"

There was a small, as he felt, harmless spark of irony in his question; which, however, she answered very simply, not noticing the insinuation. "Yes, he says England hasn't been touched—not considering all there is," she went on eagerly. "He's so interesting about our country. To listen to him makes one want so to do something."

"It would make *me* want to," said Paul Overt, feeling strongly, on the instant, the suggestion of what she said and that of the emotion with which she said it, and well aware of what an incentive on St. George's lips, such a speech might be.

"Oh you—as if you hadn't! I should like so to hear you talk together," she added ardently.

"That's very genial of you; but he'd have it all his own way. I'm prostrate before him."

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

She had an air of earnestness. "Do you think then he's so perfect?"

"Far from it. Some of his later books seem to me of a queer-ness—!"

"Yes, yes—he knows that."

Paul Overt stared. "That they seem to me of a queer-ness—!"

"Well yes, or at any rate that they're not what they should be. He told me he didn't esteem them. He has told me such wonderful things—he's so interesting."

There was a certain shock for Paul Overt in the knowledge that the fine genius they were talking of had been reduced to so explicit a confession and had made it, in his misery, to the first comer; for though Miss Fancourt was charming what was she after all but an immature girl encountered at a country-house? Yet precisely this was part of the sentiment he himself had just expressed; he would make way completely for the poor peccable great man not because he didn't read him clear, but altogether because he did. His consideration was half composed of tenderness for superficialities which he was sure their perpetrator judged privately, judged more ferociously than any one, and which represented some tragic intellectual secret. He would have his reasons for his psychology à *fleur de peau*, and these reasons could only be cruel ones, such as would make him dearer to those who already were fond of him. "You excite my envy. I have my reserves, I discriminate—but I love him," Paul said in a moment. "And seeing him for the first time this way is a great event for me."

"How momentous—how magnificent!" cried the girl. "How delicious to bring you together!"

"Your doing it—that makes it perfect," our friend returned.

"He's as eager as you," she went on. "But it's so odd you shouldn't have met."

"It's not really so odd as it strikes you. I've been out of England so much—made repeated absences all these last years."

She took this in with interest. "And yet you write of it as well as if you were always here."

"It's just the being away perhaps. At any rate the best bits, I suspect, are those that were done in dreary places abroad."

"And why were they dreary?"

"Because they were health-resorts—where my poor mother was dying."

"Your poor mother?"—she was all sweet wonder.

"We went from place to place to help her to get better. But she never did. To the deadly Riviera (I hate it!), to the high

Alps, to Algiers, and far away—a hideous journey—to Colorado.”

“And she isn’t better?” Miss Fancourt went on.

“She died a year ago.”

“Really?—like mine! Only that’s years since. Some day you must tell me about your mother,” she added.

He could at first, on this, only gaze at her. “What right things you say! If you say them to St. George I don’t wonder he’s in bondage.”

It pulled her up for a moment. “I don’t know what you mean. He doesn’t make speeches and professions at all—he isn’t ridiculous.”

“I’m afraid you consider then that I am.”

“No, I don’t”—she spoke it rather shortly. And then she added: “He understands—understands everything.”

The young man was on the point of saying jocosely: “And I don’t—is that it?” But these words, in time, changed themselves to others slightly less trivial: “Do you suppose he understands his wife?”

Miss Fancourt made no direct answer, but after a moment’s hesitation put it: “Isn’t she charming?”

“Not in the least!”

“Here he comes. Now you must know him,” she went on. A small group of visitors had gathered at the other end of the gallery and had been there overtaken by Henry St. George, who strolled in from a neighbouring room. He stood near them a moment, not falling into the talk but taking up an old miniature from a table and vaguely regarding it. At the end of a minute he became aware of Miss Fancourt and her companion in the distance; whereupon, laying down his miniature, he approached them with the same procrastinating air, his hands in his pockets and his eyes turned, right and left, to the pictures. The gallery was so long that this transit took some little time, especially as there was a moment when he stopped to admire the fine Gainsborough. “He says Mrs. St. George has been the making of him,” the girl continued in a voice slightly lowered.

“Ah he’s often obscure!” Paul laughed.

“Obscure?” she repeated as if she heard it for the first time. Her eyes rested on her other friend, and it wasn’t lost upon Paul that they appeared to send out great shafts of softness. “He’s going to speak to us!” she fondly breathed. There was a sort of rapture in her voice, and our friend was startled. “Bless my soul, does she care for him like *that*?—is she in love with him?” he mentally inquired. “Didn’t I tell you he was eager?” she had meanwhile asked of him.

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

"It's eagerness dissimulated," the young man returned as the subject of their observation lingered before his Gainsborough. "He edges towards us shyly. Does he mean that she saved him by burning that book?"

"That book? what book did she burn?" The girl quickly turned her face to him.

"Hasn't he told you then?"

"Not a word."

"Then he doesn't tell you everything!" Paul had guessed that she pretty much supposed he did. The great man had now resumed his course and come nearer; in spite of which his more qualified admirer risked a profane observation: "St. George and the Dragon is what the anecdote suggests!"

His companion, however, didn't hear it: she smiled at the dragon's adversary, "He is eager—he is!" she insisted.

"Eager for you—yes."

But meanwhile she had called out: "I'm sure you want to know Mr. Overt. You'll be great friends and it will always be delightful to me to remember I was here when you first met and that I had something to do with it."

There was a freshness of intention in the words that carried them off; nevertheless our young man was sorry for Henry St. George, as he was sorry at any time for any person publicly invited to be responsive and delightful. He would have been so touched to believe that a man he deeply admired should care a straw for him that he wouldn't play with such a presumption if it were possibly vain. In a single glance of the eye of the pardonable Master he read—having the sort of divination that belonged to his talent—that this personage had ever a store of friendly patience, which was part of his rich outfit, but was versed in no printed page of a rising scribbler. There was even a relief, a simplification, in that: liking him so much already for what he had done, how could one have liked him any more for a perception which must at the best have been vague? Paul Overt got up, trying to show his compassion, but at the same instant he found himself encompassed by St. George's happy personal art—a manner of which it was the essence to conjure away false positions. It all took place in a moment. Paul was conscious that he knew him now, conscious of his handshake and of the very quality of his hand; of his face, seen nearer and consequently seen better, of a general fraternising assurance, and in particular of the circumstance that St. George didn't dislike him (as yet at least) for being imposed by a charming but too gushing girl, attractive enough without such dangles. No irritation at any

rate was reflected in the voice with which he questioned Miss Fancourt as to some project of a walk—a general walk of the company round the park. He had soon said something to Paul about a talk—"We must have a tremendous lot of talk; there are so many things, aren't there?"—but our friend could see this idea wouldn't in the present case take very immediate effect. All the same he was extremely happy, even after the matter of the walk had been settled—the three presently passed back to the other part of the gallery, where it was discussed with several members of the party; even when, after they had all gone out together, he found himself for half an hour conjoined with Mrs. St. George. Her husband had taken the advance with Miss Fancourt, and this pair were quite out of sight. It was the prettiest of rambles for a summer afternoon—a grassy circuit, of immense extent, skirting the limit of the park within. The park was completely surrounded by its old mottled but perfect red wall, which, all the way on their left, constituted in itself an object of interest. Mrs. St. George mentioned to him the surprising number of acres thus enclosed, together with numerous other facts relating to the property and the family, and the family's other properties: she couldn't too strongly urge on him the importance of seeing their other houses. She ran over the names of these and rang the changes on them with the facility of practice, making them appear an almost endless list. She had received Paul Overt very amiably on his breaking ground with her by the mention of his joy in having just made her husband's acquaintance, and struck him as so alert and so accommodating a little woman that he was rather ashamed of his *mot* about her to Miss Fancourt; though he reflected that a hundred other people, on a hundred occasions, would have been sure to make it. He got on with Mrs. St. George, in short, better than he expected; but this didn't prevent her suddenly becoming aware that she was faint with fatigue and must take her way back to the house by the shortest cut. She professed that she hadn't the strength of a kitten and was a miserable wreck; a character he had been too preoccupied to discern in her while he wondered in what sense she could be held to have been the making of her husband. He had arrived at a glimmering of the answer when she announced that she must leave him, though this perception was of course provisional. While he was in the very act of placing himself at her disposal for the return the situation underwent a change; Lord Masham had suddenly turned up, coming back to them, overtaking them, emerging from the shrubbery—Overt could scarcely have said how he appeared—and Mrs. St. George had protested

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

that she wanted to be left alone and not to break up the party. A moment later she was walking off with Lord Masham. Our friend fell back and joined Lady Watermouth, to whom he presently mentioned that Mrs. St. George had been obliged to renounce the attempt to go further.

"She oughtn't to have come out at all," her ladyship rather grumpily remarked.

"Is she so very much of an invalid?"

"Very bad indeed." And his hostess added with still greater austerity: "She oughtn't really to come to one!" He wondered what was implied by this, and presently gathered that it was not a reflection on the lady's conduct or her moral nature: it only represented that her strength was not equal to her aspirations.

3

THE smoking-room at Summersoft was on the scale of the rest of the place; high, light, commodious and decorated with such refined old carvings and mouldings that it seemed rather a bower for ladies who should sit at work at fading crewels than a parliament of gentlemen smoking strong cigars. The gentlemen mustered there in considerable force on the Sunday evening, collecting mainly at one end, in front of one of the cool fair fireplaces of white marble, the entablature of which was adorned with a delicate little Italian "subject." There was another in the wall that faced it, and, thanks to the mild summer night, a fire in neither; but a nucleus for aggregation was furnished on one side by a table in the chimney-corner laden with bottles, decanters and tall tumblers. Paul Overt was a faithless smoker; he would puff a cigarette for reasons with which tobacco had nothing to do. This was particularly the case on the occasion of which I speak; his motive was the vision of a little direct talk with Henry St. George. The "tremendous" communion of which the great man had held out hopes to him earlier in the day had not yet come off, and this saddened him considerably, for the party was to go its several ways immediately after breakfast on the morrow. He had, however, the disappointment of finding that apparently the author of "Shadowmere" was not disposed to prolong his vigil. He wasn't among the gentlemen assembled when Paul entered, nor was he one of those who turned up, in bright habiliments, during the next ten minutes. The young man waited a little, wondering if he had only gone to put on something extraordinary; this would account for his delay as well as

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

contribute further to Overt's impression of his tendency to do the approved superficial thing. But he didn't arrive—he must have been putting on something more extraordinary than was probable. Our hero gave him up, feeling a little injured, a little wounded, at this loss of twenty coveted words. He wasn't angry, but he puffed his cigarette sighingly, with the sense of something rare possibly missed. He wandered away with his regret and moved slowly round the room, looking at the old prints on the walls. In this attitude he presently felt a hand on his shoulder and a friendly voice in his ear. "This is good. I hoped I should find you. I came down on purpose." St. George was there without a change of dress and with a fine face—his graver one—to which our young man all in a flutter responded. He explained that it was only for the Master—the idea of a little talk—that he had sat up, and that, not finding him, he had been on the point of going to bed.

"Well, you know, I don't smoke—my wife doesn't let me," said St. George, looking for a place to sit down. "It's very good for me—very good for me. Let us take that sofa."

"Do you mean smoking's good for you?"

"No no—her not letting me. It's a great thing to have a wife who's so sure of all the things one can do without. One might never find them out one's self. She doesn't allow me to touch a cigarette." They took possession of a sofa at a distance from the group of smokers, and St. George went on: "Have you got one yourself?"

"Do you mean a cigarette?"

"Dear no—a wife."

"No; and yet I'd give up my cigarette for one."

"You'd give up a good deal more than that," St. George returned. "However, you'd get a great deal in return. There's a something to be said for wives," he added, folding his arms and crossing his outstretched legs. He declined tobacco altogether and sat there without returning fire. His companion stopped smoking, touched by his courtesy; and after all they were out of the fumes, their sofa was in a far-away corner. It would have been a mistake, St. George went on, a great mistake for them to have separated without a little chat; "for I know all about you," he said, "I know you're very remarkable. You've written a very distinguished book."

"And how do you know it?" Paul asked.

"Why, my dear fellow, it's in the air, it's in the papers, it's everywhere." St. George spoke with the immediate familiarity of a confrère—a tone that seemed to his neighbour the very

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

rustle of the laurel. "You're on all men's lips and, what's better, on all women's. And I've just been reading your book."

"Just? You hadn't read it this afternoon," said Overt.

"How do you know that?"

"I think you should know how I know it," the young man laughed.

"I suppose Miss Fancourt told you."

"No indeed—she led me rather to suppose you had."

"Yes—that's much more what she'd do. Doesn't she shed a rosy glow over life? But you didn't believe her?" asked St. George.

"No, not when you came to us there."

"Did I pretend? did I pretend badly?" But without waiting for an answer to this St. George went on: "You ought always to believe such a girl as that—always, always. Some women are meant to be taken with allowances and reserves; but you must take *her* just as she is."

"I like her very much," said Paul Overt.

Something in his tone appeared to excite on his companion's part a momentary sense of the absurd; perhaps it was the air of deliberation attending this judgement. St. George broke into a laugh to reply. "It's the best thing you can do with her. She's a rare young lady! In point of fact, however, I confess I hadn't read you this afternoon."

"Then you see how right I was in this particular case not to believe Miss Fancourt."

"How right? how can I agree to that when I lost credit by it?"

"Do you wish to pass exactly for what she represents you? Certainly you needn't be afraid," Paul said.

"Ah, my dear young man, don't talk about passing—for the likes of me! I'm passing away—nothing else than that. She has a better use for her young imagination (isn't it fine?) than in 'representing' in any way such a weary wasted used-up animal!" The Master spoke with a sudden sadness that produced a protest on Paul's part; but before the protest could be uttered he went on, reverting to the latter's striking novel: "I had no idea you were so good—one hears of so many things. But you're surprisingly good."

"I'm going to be surprisingly better," Overt made bold to reply.

"I see that, and it's what fetches me. I don't see so much else—as one looks about—that's going to be surprisingly better. They're going to be consistently worse—most of the things. It's so much easier to be worse—heaven knows I've found it so. I'm

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

not in a great glow, you know, about what's breaking out all over the place. But you *must* be better—you really must keep it up. I haven't of course. It's very difficult—that's the devil of the whole thing, keeping it up. But I see you'll be able to. It will be a great disgrace if you don't."

"It's very interesting to hear you speak of yourself; but I don't know what you mean by your allusions to your having fallen off," Paul Overt observed with pardonable hypocrisy. He liked his companion so much now that the fact of any decline of talent or of care had ceased for the moment to be vivid to him.

"Don't say that—don't say that," St. George returned gravely, his head resting on the top of the sofa-back and his eyes on the ceiling. "You know perfectly what I mean. I haven't read twenty pages of your book without seeing that you can't help it."

"You make me very miserable," Paul ecstatically breathed.

"I'm glad of that, for it may serve as a kind of warning. Shocking enough it must be, especially to a young fresh mind, full of faith—the spectacle of a man meant for better things sunk at my age in such dishonour." St. George, in the same contemplative attitude, spoke softly but deliberately, and without perceptible emotion. His tone indeed suggested an impersonal lucidity that was practically cruel—cruel to himself—and made his young friend lay an argumentative hand on his arm. But he went on while his eyes seemed to follow the graces of the eighteenth-century ceiling: "Look at me well, take my lesson to heart—for it is a lesson. Let that good come of it at least that you shudder with your pitiful impression, and that this may help to keep you straight in the future. Don't become in your old age what I have in mine—the depressing, the deplorable illustration of the worship of false gods!"

"What do you mean by your old age?" the young man asked.

"It has made me old. But I like your youth."

Paul answered nothing—they sat for a minute in silence. They heard the others going on about the governmental majority. Then "What do you mean by false gods?" he enquired.

His companion had no difficulty whatever in saying, "The idols of the market; money and luxury and 'the world'; placing one's children and dressing one's wife; everything that drives one to the short and easy way. Ah the vile things they make one do!"

"But surely one's right to want to place one's children."

"One has no business to have any children," St. George

placidly declared. "I mean of course if one wants to do anything good."

"But aren't they an inspiration—an incentive?"

"An incentive to damnation, artistically speaking."

"You touch on very deep things—things I should like to discuss with you," Paul said. "I should like you to tell me volumes about yourself. This is a great feast for me!"

"Of course it is, cruel youth. But to show you I'm still not incapable, degraded as I am, of an act of faith, I'll tie my vanity to the stake for you and burn it to ashes. You must come and see me—you must come and see us," the Master quickly substituted. "Mrs. St. George is charming; I don't know whether you've had any opportunity to talk with her. She'll be delighted to see you; she likes great celebrities, whether incipient or predominant. You must come and dine—my wife will write to you. Where are you to be found?"

"This is my little address"—and Overt drew out his pocket-book and extracted a visiting-card. On second thoughts, however, he kept it back, remarking that he wouldn't trouble his friend to take charge of it but would come and see him straightway in London and leave it at his door if he should fail to obtain entrance.

"Ah you'll probably fail; my wife's always out—or when she isn't out is knocked up from having *been* out. You must come and dine—though that won't do much good either, for my wife insists on big dinners." St. George turned it over further, but then went on: "You must come down and see us in the country, that's the best way; we've plenty of room, and it isn't bad."

"You've a house in the country?" Paul asked enviously.

"Ah not like this! But we have a sort of place we go to—an hour from Euston. That's one of the reasons."

"One of the reasons?"

"Why my books are so bad."

"You must tell me all the others!" Paul longingly laughed.

His friend made no direct rejoinder to this, but spoke again abruptly. "Why have I never seen you before?"

The tone of the question was singularly flattering to our hero, who felt it to imply the great man's now perceiving he had for years missed something. "Partly, I suppose, because there has been no particular reason why you should see me. I haven't lived in the world—in your world. I've spent many years out of England, in different places abroad."

"Well, please don't do it any more. You must do England—there's such a lot of it."

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

"Do you mean I must write about it?" and Paul struck the note of the listening candour of a child.

"Of course you must. And tremendously well, do you mind? That takes off a little of my esteem for this thing of yours—that it goes on abroad. Hang 'abroad!' Stay at home and do things here—do subjects we can measure."

"I'll do whatever you tell me," Overt said, deeply attentive. "But pardon me if I say I don't understand how you've been reading my book," he added. "I've had you before me all the afternoon, first in that long walk, then at tea on the lawn, till we went to dress for dinner, and all the evening at dinner and in this place."

St. George turned his face about with a smile. "I gave it but a quarter of an hour."

"A quarter of an hour's immense, but I don't understand where you put it in. In the drawing-room after dinner you weren't reading—you were talking to Miss Fancourt."

"It comes to the same thing, because we talked about 'Ginistrella.' She described it to me—she lent me her copy."

"Lent it to you?"

"She travels with it."

"It's incredible," Paul blushed.

"It's glorious for you, but it also turned out very well for me. When the ladies went off to bed she kindly offered to send the book down to me. Her maid brought it to me in the hall and I went to my room with it. I hadn't thought of coming here, I do that so little. But I don't sleep early, I always have to read an hour or two. I sat down to your novel on the spot, without undressing, without taking off anything but my coat. I think that's a sign my curiosity had been strongly roused about it. I read a quarter of an hour, as I tell you, and even in a quarter of an hour I was greatly struck."

"Ah the beginning isn't very good—it's the whole thing!" said Overt, who had listened to this recital with extreme interest. "And you laid down the book and came after me?" he asked.

"That's the way it moved me. I said to myself 'I see it's off his own bat, and he's there, by the way, and the day's over and I haven't said twenty words to him.' It occurred to me that you'd probably be in the smoking-room and that it wouldn't be too late to repair my omission. I wanted to do something civil to you, so I put on my coat and came down. I shall read your book again when I go up."

Our friend faced round in his place—he was touched as he had scarce ever been by the picture of such a demonstration in

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

his favour. "You're really the kindest of men. *Cela s'est passé comme ça?*—and I've been sitting here with you all this time and never apprehended it and never thanked you!"

"Thank Miss Fancourt—it was she who wound me up. She has made me feel as if I had read your novel."

"She's an angel from heaven!" Paul declared.

"She is indeed. I've never seen any one like her. Her interest in literature's touching—something quite peculiar to herself; she takes it all so seriously. She feels the arts and she wants to feel them more. To those who practise them it's almost humiliating—her curiosity, her sympathy, her good faith. How can anything be as fine as she supposes it?"

"She's a rare organisation," the younger man sighed.

"The richest I've ever seen—an artistic intelligence really of the first order. And lodged in such a form!" St. George exclaimed.

"One would like to represent such a girl as that," Paul continued.

"Ah there it is—there's nothing like life!" said his companion. "When you're finished, squeezed dry and used up and you think the sack's empty, you're still appealed to, you still get touches and thrills, the idea springs up—out of the lap of the actual—and shows you there's always something to be done. But I shan't do it—she's not for me!"

"How do you mean, not for you?"

"Oh it's all over—she's for you, if you like."

"Ah much less!" said Paul. "She's not for a dingy little man of letters; she's for the world, the bright rich world of bribes and rewards. And the world will take hold of her—it will carry her away."

"It will try—but it's just a case in which there may be a fight. It would be worth fighting, for a man who had it in him, with youth and talent on his side."

These words rang not a little in Paul Overt's consciousness—they held him briefly silent. "It's a wonder she has remained as she is; giving herself away so—with so much to give away."

"Remaining, you mean, so ingenuous—so natural? Oh she doesn't care a straw—she gives away because she overflows. She has her own feelings, her own standards; she doesn't keep remembering that she must be proud. And then she hasn't been here long enough to be spoiled; she has picked up a fashion or two, but only the amusing ones. She's a provincial—a provincial of genius," St. George went on; "her very blunders are charming,

her mistakes are interesting. She has come back from Asia with all sorts of excited curiosities and unappeased appetites. She's first-rate herself and she expends herself on the second-rate. She's life herself and she takes a rare interest in imitations. She mixes all things up, but there are none in regard to which she hasn't perceptions. She sees things in a perspective—as if from the top of the Himalayas—and she enlarges everything she touches. Above all she exaggerates—to herself, I mean. She exaggerates you and me ! ”

There was nothing in that description to allay the agitation caused in our younger friend by such a sketch of a fine subject. It seemed to him to show the art of St. George's admired hand, and he lost himself in gazing at the vision—this hovered there before him—of a woman's figure which should be part of the glory of a novel. But at the end of a moment the thing had turned into smoke, and out of the smoke—the last puff of a big cigar—proceeded the voice of General Fancourt, who had left the others, and come and planted himself before the gentlemen on the sofa. “ I suppose that when you fellows get talking you sit up half the night.”

“ Half the night ?—*jamais de la vie !* I follow a hygiene ”—and St. George rose to his feet.

“ I see—you're hothouse plants,” laughed the General. “ That's the way you produce your flowers.”

“ I produce mine between ten and one every morning—I bloom with a regularity ! ” St. George went on.

“ And with a splendour ! ” added the polite General, while Paul noted how little the author of “ Shadowmere ” minded, as he phrased it to himself, when addressed as a celebrated storyteller. The young man had an idea *he* should never get used to that ; it would always make him uncomfortable—from the suspicion that people would think they had to—and he would want to prevent it. Evidently his great colleague had toughened and hardened—had made himself a surface. The group of men had finished their cigars and taken up their bedroom candlesticks ; but before they all passed out Lord Watermouth invited the pair of guests who had been so absorbed together to “ have ” something. It happened that they both declined ; upon which General Fancourt said : “ Is that the hygiene ? You don't water the flowers ? ”

“ Oh I should drown them ! ” St. George replied ; but, leaving the room still at his young friend's side, he added whimsically, for the latter's benefit, in a lower tone : “ My wife doesn't let

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

"Well, I'm glad I'm not one of you fellows!" the General richly concluded.

The nearness of Summersoft to London had this consequence, chilling to a person who had had a vision of sociability in a railway-carriage, that most of the company, after breakfast, drove back to town, entering their own vehicles, which had come out to fetch them, while their servants returned by train with their luggage. Three or four young men, among whom was Paul Overt, also availed themselves of the common convenience; but they stood in the portico of the house and saw the others roll away. Miss Fancourt got into a victoria with her father after she had shaken hands with our hero and said, smiling in the frankest way in the world, "*I must see you more. Mrs. St. George is so nice: she has promised to ask us both to dinner together.*" This lady and her husband took their places in a perfectly-appointed brougham—she required a closed carriage—and as our young man waved his hat to them in response to their nods and flourishes he reflected that, taken together, they were an honourable image of success, of the material rewards and the social credit of literature. Such things were not the full measure, but he nevertheless felt a little proud for literature.

4

BEFORE a week had elapsed he met Miss Fancourt in Bond Street, at a private view of the works of a young artist in "black-and-white" who had been so good as to invite him to the stuffy scene. The drawings were admirable, but the crowd in the one little room was so dense that he felt himself up to his neck in a sack of wool. A fringe of people at the outer edge endeavoured by curving forward their backs and presenting, below them, a still more convex surface of resistance to the pressure of the mass, to preserve an interval between their noses and the glazed mounts of the pictures; while the central body, in the comparative gloom projected by a wide horizontal screen hung under the skylight and allowing only a margin for the day, remained upright dense and vague, lost in the contemplation of its own ingredients. This contemplation sat especially in the sad eyes of certain female heads, surmounted with hats of strange convolution and plumage, which rose on long necks above the others. One of the heads, Paul perceived, was much the most beautiful of the collection, and his next discovery was that it belonged to Miss Fancourt. Its beauty was enhanced by the glad smile she sent

him across surrounding obstructions, a smile that drew him to her as fast as he could make his way. He had seen for himself at Summersoft that the last thing her nature contained was an affectation of indifference ; yet even with this circumspection he took a fresh satisfaction in her not having pretended to await his arrival with composure. She smiled as radiantly as if she wished to make him hurry, and as soon as he came within earshot she broke out in her voice of joy : " He's here—he's here—he's coming back in a moment ! "

" Ah your father ? " Paul returned as she offered him her hand.

" Oh dear no, this isn't my poor father's line. I mean Mr. St. George. He has just left me to speak to some one—he's coming back. It's he who brought me—wasn't it charming ? "

" Ah that gives him a pull over me—I couldn't have ' brought ' you, could I ? "

" If you had been so kind as to propose it—why not you as well as he ? " the girl returned with a face that, expressing no cheap coquetry, simply affirmed a happy fact.

" Why he's a *père de famille*. They've privileges," Paul explained. And then quickly : " Will you go to see places with me ? " he asked.

" Anything you like ! " she smiled. " I know what you mean, that girls have to have a lot of people—" Then she broke off : " I don't know ; I'm free. I've always been like that—I can go about with any one. I'm so glad to meet you," she added with a sweet distinctness that made those near her turn round.

" Let me at least repay that speech by taking you out of this squash," her friend said. " Surely people aren't happy here ! "

" No, they're awfully *mornes*, aren't they ? But I'm very happy indeed and I promised Mr. St. George to remain in this spot till he comes back. He's going to take me away. They send him invitations for things of this sort—more than he wants. It was so kind of him to think of me." •

" They also send me invitations of this kind—more than I want. And if thinking of *you* will do it— ! " Paul went on.

" Oh I delight in them—everything that's life—everything that's London ! "

" They don't have private views in Asia, I suppose," he laughed. " But what a pity that for this year, even in this gorged city, they're pretty well over." •

" Well, next year will do, for I hope you believe we're going to be friends always. Here he comes ! " Miss Fancourt continued before Paul had time to respond.

He made out St. George in the gaps of the crowd, and this

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

perhaps led to his hurrying a little to say : " I hope that doesn't mean I'm to wait till next year to see you."

" No, no—aren't we to meet at dinner on the twenty-fifth ? " she panted with an eagerness as happy as his own.

" That's almost next year. Is there no means of seeing you before ? "

She stared with all her brightness. " Do you mean you'd *come* ? "

" Like a shot, if you'll be so good as to ask me ! "

" On Sunday then—this next Sunday ? "

" What have I done that you should doubt it ? " the young man asked with delight.

Miss Fancourt turned instantly to St. George, who had now joined them, and announced triumphantly : " He's coming on Sunday—this next Sunday ! "

" Ah my day—my day too ! " said the famous novelist, laughing, to their companion.

" Yes, but not yours only. You shall meet in Manchester Square ; you shall talk—you shall be wonderful ! "

" We don't meet often enough," St. George allowed, shaking hands with his disciple. " Too many things—ah too many things ! But we must make it up in the country in September. You won't forget you've promised me that ? "

" Why he's coming on the twenty-fifth—you'll see him then," said the girl.

" On the twenty-fifth ? " St. George asked vaguely.

" We dine with you ; I hope you haven't forgotten. He's dining out that day," she added gaily to Paul.

" Oh bless me, yes—that's charming ! And you're coming ? My wife didn't tell me," St. George said to him. " Too many things—too many things ! " he repeated.

" Too many people—too many people ! " Paul exclaimed, giving ground before the penetration of an elbow.

" You oughtn't to say that. They all read you."

" Me ? I should like to see them ! Only two or three at most," the young man returned.

" Did you ever hear anything like that ? He knows, haughtily, how good he is ! " St. George declared, laughing to Miss Fancourt. " They read *me*, but that doesn't make me like them any better. Come away from them, come away ! " And he led the way out of the exhibition.

" He's going to take me to the Park," Miss Fancourt observed to Overt with elation as they passed along the corridor that led to the street.

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

"Ah does he go there?" Paul asked, taking the fact for a somewhat unexpected illustration of St. George's *mœurs*.

"It's a beautiful day—there'll be a great crowd. We're going to look at the people, to look at types," the girl went on. "We shall sit under the trees; we shall walk by the Row."

"I go once a year—on business," said St. George, who had overheard Paul's question.

"Or with a country cousin, didn't you tell me? I'm the country cousin!" she continued over her shoulder to Paul as their friend drew her toward a hansom to which he had signalled. The young man watched them get in; he returned, as he stood there, the friendly wave of the hand with which, ensconced in the vehicle beside her, St. George took leave of him. He even lingered to see the vehicle start away and lose itself in the confusion of Bond Street. He followed it with his eyes; it put to him embarrassing things. "She's not for *me*!" the great novelist had said emphatically at Summersoft; but his manner of conducting himself toward her appeared not quite in harmony with such a conviction. How could he have behaved differently if she *had* been for him? An indefinite envy rose in Paul Overt's heart as he took his way on foot alone; a feeling addressed alike, strangely enough, to each of the occupants of the hansom. How much he should like to rattle about London with such a girl! How much he should like to go and look at "types" with St. George!

The next Sunday at four o'clock he called in Manchester Square, where his secret wish was gratified by his finding Miss Fancourt alone. She was in a large bright friendly occupied room, which was painted red all over, draped with the quaint cheap florid stuffs that are represented as coming from southern and eastern countries, where they are fabled to serve as the counterpanes of the peasantry, and bedecked with pottery of vivid hues, ranged on casual shelves, and with many water-colour drawings from the hand (as the visitor learned) of the young lady herself, commemorating with a brave breadth the sunsets, the mountains, the temples and palaces of India. He sat an hour—more than an hour, two hours—and all the while no one came in. His hostess was so good as to remark, with her liberal humanity, that it was delightful they weren't interrupted; it was so rare in London, especially at that season, that people got a good talk. But luckily now, of a fine Sunday, half the world went out of town, and that made it better for those who didn't go, when these others were in sympathy. It was the defect of London—one of two or three, the very short list of those she recognised in

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

the teeming world-city she adored—that there were too few good chances for talk ; you never had time to carry anything far.

"Too many things—too many things !" Paul said, quoting St. George's exclamation of a few days before.

"Ah yes, for him there are too many—his life's too complicated."

"Have you seen it *near* ? That's what I should like to do ; it might explain some mysteries," her visitor went on. She asked him what mysteries he meant, and he said : "Oh peculiarities of his work, inequalities, superficialities. For one who looks at it from the artistic point of view it contains a bottomless ambiguity."

She became at this, on the spot, all intensity. "Ah do describe that more—it's so interesting. There are no such suggestive questions. I'm so fond of them. He thinks he's a failure—fancy !" she beautifully wailed.

"That depends on what his ideal may have been. With his gifts it ought to have been high. But till one knows what he really proposed to himself—? Do *you* know by chance ?" the young man broke off.

"Oh he doesn't talk to me about himself. I can't make him. It's too provoking."

Paul was on the point of asking what then he did talk about, but discretion checked it and he said instead : "Do you think he's unhappy at home ?"

She seemed to wonder. "At home ?"

"I mean in his relations with his wife. He has a mystifying little way of alluding to her."

"Not to me," said Marian Fancourt with her clear eyes. "That wouldn't be right, would it ?" she asked gravely.

"Not particularly ; so I'm glad he doesn't mention her to you. To praise her might bore you, and he has no business to do anything else. Yet he knows you better than me."

"Ah but he respects *you* !" the girl cried as with envy.

Her visitor stared a moment, then broke into a laugh. "Doesn't he respect you ?"

"Of course, but not in the same way. He respects what you've done—he told me so, the other day."

Paul drank it in, but retained his faculties. "When you went to look at types ?"

"Yes—we found so many : he has such an observation of them ! He talked a great deal about your book. He says it's really important."

"Important ! Ah the grand creature !"—and the author of the work in question groaned for joy.

"He was wonderfully amusing, he was inexpressibly droll, while we walked about. He sees everything ; he has so many comparisons and images, and they're always exactly right. *C'est d'un trouvé*, as they say."

"Yes, with his gifts, such things as he ought to have done ! " Paul sighed.

"And don't you think he *has* done them ? "

Ah it was just the point. "A part of them, and of course even that part's immense. But he might have been one of the greatest. However, let us not make this an hour of qualifications. Even as they stand," our friend earnestly concluded, "his writings are a mine of gold."

To this proposition she ardently responded, and for half an hour the pair talked over the Master's principal productions. She knew them well—she knew them even better than her visitor, who was struck with her critical intelligence and with something large and bold in the movement in her mind. She said things that startled him and that evidently had come to her directly ; they weren't picked-up phrases—she placed them too well. St. George had been right about her being first-rate, about her not being afraid to gush, not remembering that she must be proud. Suddenly something came back to her, and she said : "I recollect that he did speak of Mrs. St. George to me once. He said, apropos of something or other, that she didn't care for perfection."

"That's a great crime in an artist's wife," Paul returned.

"Yes, poor thing ! " and the girl sighed with a suggestion of many reflections, some of them mitigating. But she presently added : "Ah perfection, perfection—how one ought to go in for it ! I wish *I* could."

"Every one can in his way," her companion opined.

"In *his* way, yes—but not in hers. Women are so hampered—so condemned ! Yet it's a kind of dishonour if you don't, when you want to *do* something, isn't it ? " Miss Fancourt pursued, dropping one train in her quickness to take up another, an accident that was common with her. So these two young persons sat discussing high themes in their eclectic drawing-room, in their London "season"—discussing, with extreme seriousness, the high theme of perfection. It must be said in extenuation of this eccentricity that they were interested in the business. Their tone had truth and their emotion beauty ; they weren't posturing for each other or for some one else.

The subject was so wide that they found themselves reducing it ; the perfection to which for the moment, they agreed to

confine their speculations was that of the valid, the exemplary work of art. Our young woman's imagination, it appeared, had wandered far in that direction, and her guest had the rare delight of feeling in their conversation a full interchange. This episode will have lived for years in his memory and even in his wonder ; it had the quality that fortune distils in a single drop at a time—the quality that lubricates many ensuing frictions. He still, whenever he likes, has a vision of the room, the bright red sociable talkative room with the curtains that, by a stroke of successful audacity, had the note of vivid blue. He remembers where certain things stood, the particular book open on the table and the almost intense odour of the flowers placed, at the left, somewhere behind him. These facts were the fringe, as it were, of a fine special agitation which had its birth in those two hours and of which perhaps the main sign was in its leading him inwardly and repeatedly to breathe " I had no idea there was any one like this—I had no idea there was any one like this ! " Her freedom amazed him and charmed him—it seemed so to simplify the practical question. She was on the footing of an independent personage—a motherless girl who had passed out of her teens and had a position and responsibilities, who wasn't held down to the limitations of a little miss. She came and went with no dragged duenna, she received people alone, and, though she was totally without hardness, the question of protection or patronage had no relevancy in regard to her. She gave such an impression of the clear and the noble combined with the easy and the natural that in spite of her eminent modern situation she suggested no sort of sisterhood with the " fast " girl. Modern she was indeed, and made Paul Overt, who loved old colour, the golden glaze of time, think with some alarm of the muddled palette of the future. He couldn't get used to her interest in the arts he cared for ; it seemed too good to be real—it was so unlikely an adventure to tumble into such a well of sympathy. One might stray into the desert easily—that was on the cards and that was the law of life ; but it was too rare an accident to stumble on a crystal well. Yet if her aspirations seemed at one moment too extravagant to be real they struck him at the next as too intelligent to be false. They were both high and lame, and, whims for whims, he preferred them to any he had met in a like relation. It was probable enough she would leave them behind—exchange them for politics or " smartness " or mere prolific maternity, as was the custom of scribbling daubing educated flattered girls in an age of luxury and a society of leisure. He noted that the water-colours on the walls of the room she sat in had mainly the quality of being

naïves, and reflected that naïveté in art is like a zero in a number : its importance depends on the figure it is united with. Meanwhile, however, he had fallen in love with her. Before he went away, at any rate, he said to her : “ I thought St. George was coming to see you to-day, but he doesn’t turn up.”

For a moment he supposed she was going to cry “ *Comment done ?* Did you come here only to meet him ? ” But the next he became aware of how little such a speech would have fallen in with any note of flirtation he had as yet perceived in her. She only replied : “ Ah yes, but I don’t think he’ll come. He recommended me not to expect him.” Then she gaily but all gently added : “ He said it wasn’t fair to you. But I think I could manage two.”

“ So could I,” Paul Overt returned, stretching the point a little to meet her. In reality his appreciation of the occasion was so completely an appreciation of the woman before him that another figure in the scene, even so esteemed a one as St. George, might for the hour have appealed to him vainly. He left the house wondering what the great man had meant by its not being fair to him ; and, still more than that, whether he had actually stayed away from the force of that idea. As he took his course through the Sunday solitude of Manchester Square, swinging his stick and with a good deal of emotion fermenting in his soul, it appeared to him he was living in a world strangely magnanimous. Miss Fancourt had told him it was possible she should be away, and that her father should be, on the following Sunday, but that she had the hope of a visit from him in the other event. She promised to let him know should their absence fail, and then he might act accordingly. After he had passed into one of the streets that open from the Square, he stopped, without definite intentions, looking sceptically for a cab. In a moment he saw a hansom roll through the place from the other side and come a part of the way toward him. He was on the point of hailing the driver when he noticed a “ fare ” within ; then he waited, seeing the man prepare to deposit his passenger by pulling up at one of the houses. The house was apparently the one he himself had just quitted ; at least he drew that inference as he recognised Henry St. George in the person who stepped out of the hansom. Paul turned off as quickly as if he had been caught in the act of spying. He gave up his cab—he preferred to walk ; he would go nowhere else. He was glad St. George hadn’t renounced his visit altogether—that would have been too absurd. Yes, the world was magnanimous, and even he himself felt so as, on looking at his watch, he noted but six o’clock, so that he could mentally

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

congratulate his successor on having an hour still to sit in Miss Fancourt's drawing-room. He himself might use that hour for another visit, but by the time he reached the Marble Arch the idea of such a course had become incongruous to him. He passed beneath that architectural effort and walked into the Park till he got upon the spreading grass. Here he continued to walk ; he took his way across the elastic turf and came out by the Serpentine. He watched with a friendly eye the diversions of the London people, he bent a glance almost encouraging on the young ladies paddling their sweethearts about the lake and the guardsmen tickling tenderly with their bearskins the artificial flowers in the Sunday hats of their partners. He prolonged his meditative walk ; he went into Kensington Gardens, he sat upon the penny chairs, he looked at the little sail-boats launched upon the round pond and was glad he had no engagement to dine. He repaired for this purpose, very late, to his club, where he found himself unable to order a repast and told the waiter to bring whatever there was. He didn't even observe what he was served with, and he spent the evening in the library of the establishment, pretending to read an article in an American magazine. He failed to discover what it was about ; it appeared in a dim way to be about Marian Fancourt.

Quite late in the week she wrote to him that she was not to go into the country—it had only just been settled. Her father, she added, would never settle anything, but put it all on her. She felt her responsibility—she had to—and since she was forced this was the way she had decided. She mentioned no reasons, which gave our friend all the clearer field for bold conjecture about them. In Manchester Square on this second Sunday he esteemed his fortune less good, for she had three or four other visitors. But there were three or four compensations ; perhaps the greatest of which was that, learning how her father had after all, at the last hour, gone out of town alone, the bold conjecture I just now spoke of found itself becoming a shade more bold. And then her presence was her presence, and the personal red room was there and was full of it, whatever phantoms passed and vanished, emitting incomprehensible sounds. Lastly, he had the resource of staying till every one had come and gone and of believing this grateful to her, though she gave no particular sign. When they were alone together he came to his point. " But St. George did come—last Sunday. I saw him as I looked back."

" Yes ; but it was the last time."

" The last time ? "

" He said he would never come again."

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

Paul Overt stared. "Does he mean he wishes to cease to see you?"

"I don't know what he means," the girl bravely smiled. "He won't at any rate see me here."

"And pray why not?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Marian Fancourt, whose visitor found her more perversely sublime than ever yet as she professed this clear helplessness.

5

"Oh I say, I want you to stop a little," Henry St. George said to him at eleven o'clock the night he dined with the head of the profession. The company—none of it indeed *of* the profession—had been numerous and was taking its leave; our young man, after bidding good-night to his hostess, had put out his hand in farewell to the master of the house. Besides drawing from the latter the protest I have cited this movement provoked a further priceless word about their chance now to have a talk, their going into his room, his having still everything to say. Paul Overt was all delight at this kindness; nevertheless he mentioned in weak jocose qualification the bare fact that he had promised to go to another place which was at a considerable distance.

"Well then you'll break your promise, that's all. You quite awful humbug!" St. George added in a tone that confirmed our young man's case.

"Certainly I'll break it—but it was a real promise."

"Do you mean to Miss Fancourt? You're following her?" his friend asked.

He answered by a question. "Oh is *she* going?"

"Base impostor!" his ironic host went on. "I've treated you handsomely on the article of that young lady: I won't make another concession. Wait three minutes—I'll be with you." He gave himself to his departing guests, accompanied the long-trained ladies to the door. It was a hot night, the windows were open, the sound of the quick carriages and of the linkmen's call came into the house. The affair had rather glittered; a sense of festal things was in the heavy air; not only the influence of that particular entertainment, but the suggestion of the wide hurry of pleasure which in London on summer nights fills so many of the happier quarters of the complicated town. Gradually Mrs. St. George's drawing-room emptied itself; Paul was left alone with his hostess, to whom he explained the motive of his

waiting. "Ah yes, some intellectual, some *professional*, talk," she leered; "at this season doesn't one miss it? Poor dear Henry, I'm so glad!" The young man looked out of the window a moment, at the called hansoms that lurched up, at the smooth broughams that rolled away. When he turned round Mrs. St. George had disappeared; her husband's voice rose to him from below—he was laughing and talking, in the portico, with some lady who awaited her carriage. Paul had solitary possession, for some minutes, of the warm deserted rooms where the covered tinted lamplight was soft, the seats had been pushed about and the odour of flowers lingered. They were large, they were pretty, they contained objects of value; everything in the picture told of a "good house." At the end of five minutes a servant came in with a request from the Master that he would join him downstairs; upon which, descending, he followed his conductor through a long passage to an apartment thrown out, in the rear of the habitation, for the special requirements, as he guessed, of a busy man of letters.

St. George was in his shirt-sleeves in the middle of a large high room—a room without windows, but with a wide skylight at the top, that of a place of exhibition. It was furnished as a library, and the serried bookshelves rose to the ceiling, a surface of incomparable tone produced by dimly-gilt "backs" interrupted here and there by the suspension of old prints and drawings. At the end furthest from the door of admission was a tall desk, of great extent, at which the person using it could write only in the erect posture of a clerk in a counting-house; and stretched from the entrance to this structure was a wide plain band of crimson cloth, as straight as a garden-path and almost as long, where, in his mind's eye, Paul at once beheld the Master pace to and fro during vexed hours—hours, that is, of admirable composition. The servant gave him a coat, an old jacket with a hang of experience, from a cupboard in the wall, retiring afterwards with the garment he had taken off. Paul Overt welcomed the coat; it was a coat for talk, it promised confidences—having visibly received so many—and had tragic literary elbows. "Ah we're practical—we're practical!" St. George said as he saw his visitor look the place over. "Isn't it a good big cage for going round and round? My wife invented it and she locks me up here every morning."

Our young man breathed—by way of tribute—with a certain oppression. "You don't miss a window—a place to look out?"

"I did at first awfully; but her calculation was just. It saves time, it has saved me many months in these ten years. Here I

stand, under the eye of day—in London of course, very often, it's rather a bleared old eye—walled in to my trade. I can't get away—so the room's a fine lesson in concentration. I've learnt the lesson, I think ; look at that big bundle of proof and acknowledge it." He pointed to a fat roll of papers, on one of the tables, which had not been undone.

"Are you bringing out another—?" Paul asked in a tone the fond deficiencies of which he didn't recognise till his companion burst out laughing, and indeed scarce even then.

"You humbug, you humbug!"—St. George appeared to enjoy caressing him, as it were, with that opprobrium. "Don't I know what you think of them?" he asked, standing there with his hands in his pockets and with a new kind of smile. It was as if he were going to let his young votary see him all now.

"Upon my word in that case you know more than I do!" the latter ventured to respond, revealing a part of the torment of being able neither clearly to esteem nor distinctly to renounce him.

"My dear fellow," said the more and more interesting Master, "don't imagine I talk about my books specifically ; they're not a decent subject—*il ne manquerait plus que ça!* I'm not so bad as you may apprehend! About myself, yes, a little, if you like ; though it wasn't for that I brought you down here. I want to ask you something—very much indeed ; I value this chance. Therefore sit down. We're practical, but there *is* a sofa, you see—for she does humour my poor bones so far. Like all really great administrators and disciplinarians she knows when wisely to relax." Paul sank into the corner of a deep leathern couch, but his friend remained standing and explanatory. "If you don't mind, in this room, this is my habit. From the door to the desk and from the desk to the door. That shakes up my imagination gently ; and don't you see what a good thing it is that there's no window for her to fly out of? The eternal standing as I write (I stop at that bureau and put it down, when anything comes, and so we go on) was rather wearisome at first, but we adopted it with an eye to the long run ; you're in better order—if your legs don't break down!—and you can keep it up for more years. Oh we're practical—we're practical!" St. George repeated, going to the table and taking up all mechanically the bundle of proofs. But, pulling off the wrapper, he had a change of attention that appealed afresh to our hero. He lost himself a moment, examining the sheets of his new book, while the younger man's eyes wandered over the room again.

"Lord, what good things I should do if I had such a charming place as this to do them in!" Paul reflected. The outer world,

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

the world of accident and ugliness, was so successfully excluded, and within the rich protecting square, beneath the patronising sky, the dream-figures, the summoned company, could hold their particular revel. It was a fond prevision of Overt's rather than an observation on actual data, for which occasions had been too few, that the Master thus more closely viewed would have the quality, the charming gift, of flashing out, all surprisingly, in personal intercourse and at moments of suspended or perhaps even of diminished expectation. A happy relation with him would be a thing proceeding by jumps, not by traceable stages.

"Do you read them—really?" he asked, laying down the proofs on Paul's enquiring of him how soon the work would be published. And when the young man answered "Oh yes, always," he was moved to mirth again by something he caught in his manner of saying that. "You go to see your grandmother on her birthday—and very proper it is, especially as she won't last for ever. She has lost every faculty and every sense; she neither sees, nor hears, nor speaks; but all customary pieties and kindly habits are respectable. Only you're strong if you *do* read 'em! I couldn't, my dear fellow. You *are* strong, I know; and that's just a part of what I wanted to say to you. You're very strong indeed. I've been going into your other things—they've interested me immensely. Some one ought to have told me about them before—some one I could believe. But whom can one believe? You're wonderfully on the right road—it's awfully decent work. Now do you mean to keep it up?—that's what I want to ask you."

"Do I mean to do others?" Paul asked, looking up from his sofa at his erect inquisitor and feeling partly like a happy little boy when the schoolmaster is gay, and partly like some pilgrim of old who might have consulted a world-famous oracle. St. George's own performance had been infirm, but as an adviser he would be infallible.

"Others—others? Ah the number won't matter; one other would do, if it were really a further step—a throb of the same effort. What I mean is have you it in your heart to go in for some sort of decent perfection?"

"Ah decency, ah perfection—!" the young man sincerely sighed. "I talked of them the other Sunday with Miss Fancourt."

It produced on the Master's part a laugh of odd acrimony. "Yes, they'll 'talk' of them as much as you like! But they'll do little to help one to them. There's no obligation of course; only you strike me as capable," he went on. "You must have thought it all over. I can't believe you're without a plan. That's

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

the sensation you give me, and it's so rare that it really stirs one up—it makes you remarkable. If you haven't a plan, if you *don't* mean to keep it up, surely you're within your rights ; it's nobody's business, no one can force you, and not more than two or three people will notice you don't go straight. The others—all the rest, every blest soul in England, will think you do—will think you *are* keeping it up : upon my honour they will ! I shall be one of the two or three who know better. Now the question is whether you can do it for two or three. Is that the stuff you're made of ? ”

It locked his guest a minute as in closed throbbing arms. “ I could do it for one, if you were the one.”

“ Don't say that ; I don't deserve it ; it scorches me,” he protested with eyes suddenly grave and glowing. “ The ‘ one ’ is of course one's self, one's conscience, one's idea, the singleness of one's aim. I think of that pure spirit as a man thinks of a woman he has in some detested hour of his youth loved and forsaken. She haunts him with reproachful eyes, she lives for ever before him. As an artist, you know, I've married for money.” Paul stared and even blushed a little, confounded by this avowal ; whereupon his host, observing the expression of his face, dropped a quick laugh and pursued : “ You don't follow my figure. I'm not speaking of my dear wife, who had a small fortune—which, however, was not my bribe. I fell in love with her, as many other people have done. I refer to the mercenary muse whom I led to the altar of literature. Don't, my boy, put your nose into *that* yoke. The awful jade will lead you a life ! ”

Our hero watched him, wondering and deeply touched. “ Haven't you been happy ? ”

“ Happy ? It's a kind of hell.”

“ There are things I should like to ask you,” Paul said after a pause.

“ Ask me anything in all the world. I'd turn myself inside out to save you.”

“ To ‘ save ’ me ? ” he quavered.

“ To make you stick to it—to make you see it through. As I said to you the other night at Summersoft, let my example be vivid to you.”

“ Why your books are not so bad as that,” said Paul, fairly laughing and feeling that if ever a fellow had breathed the air of art—— !

“ So bad as what ? ”

“ Your talent's so great that it's in everything you do, in what's less good as well as in what's best. You've some forty

volumes to show for it—forty volumes of wonderful life, of rare observation, of magnificent ability.”

“I’m very clever, of course I know that”—but it was a thing, in fine, this author made nothing of. “Lord, what rot they’d all be if I hadn’t been! I’m a successful charlatan,” he went on—“I’ve been able to pass off my system. But do you know what it is? It’s carton-pierre.”

“Carton-pierre?” Paul was struck, and gaped.

“Lincrusta-Walton!”

“Ah don’t say such things—you make me bleed!” the younger man protested. “I see you in a beautiful fortunate home, living in comfort and honour.”

“Do you call it honour?”—his host took him up with an intonation that often comes back to him. “That’s what I want *you* to go in for. I mean the real thing. This is brummagem.”

“Brummagem?” Paul ejaculated while his eyes wandered, by a movement natural at the moment, over the luxurious room.

“Ah they make it so well to-day—it’s wonderfully deceptive!”

Our friend thrilled with the interest and perhaps even more with the pity of it. Yet he wasn’t afraid to seem to patronise when he could still so far envy. “Is it deceptive that I find you living with every appearance of domestic felicity—blest with a devoted, accomplished wife, with children whose acquaintance I haven’t yet had the pleasure of making, but who *must* be delightful young people, from what I know of their parents?”

St. George smiled at for the candour of his question. “It’s all excellent, my dear fellow—heaven forbid I should deny it. I’ve made a great deal of money; my wife has known how to take care of it, to use it without wasting it, to put a good bit of it by, to make it fructify. I’ve got a loaf on the shelf; I’ve got everything in fact but the great thing.”

“The great thing?” Paul kept echoing.

“The sense of having done the best—the sense which is the real life of the artist and the absence of which is his death, of having drawn from his intellectual instrument the finest music that nature had hidden in it, of having played it as it should be played. He either does that or he doesn’t—and if he doesn’t he isn’t worth speaking of. Therefore, precisely, those who really know *don’t* speak of him. He may still hear a great chatter, but what he hears most is the incorruptible silence of Fame. I’ve squared her, you may say, for my little hour—but what’s my little hour? Don’t imagine for a moment,” the Master pursued, “that I’m such a cad as to have brought you down here to abuse or to complain of my wife to you. She’s a woman of distinguished

qualities, to whom my obligations are immense ; so that, if you please, we'll say nothing about her. My boys—my children are all boys—are straight and strong, thank God, and have no poverty of growth about them, no penury of needs. I receive periodically the most satisfactory attestation from Harrow, from Oxford, from Sandhurst—oh we've done the best for them!—of their eminence as living thriving consuming organisms."

"It must be delightful to feel that the son of one's loins is at Sandhurst," Paul remarked enthusiastically.

"It is—it's charming. Oh I'm a patriot!"

The young man then could but have the greater tribute of questions to pay. "Then what did you mean—the other night at Summersoft—by saying that children are a curse?"

"My dear youth, on what basis are we talking?" and St. George dropped upon the sofa at a short distance from him. Sitting a little sideways he leaned back against the opposite arm with his hands raised and interlocked behind his head. "On the supposition that a certain perfection's possible and even desirable— isn't it so? Well, all I say is that one's children interfere with perfection. One's wife interferes. Marriage interferes."

"You think then the artist shouldn't marry?"

"He does so at his peril—he does so at his cost."

"Not even when his wife's in sympathy with his work?"

"She never is—she can't be! Women haven't a conception of such things."

"Surely they on occasion work themselves." Paul objected.

"Yes, very badly indeed. Oh of course, often, they think they understand, they think they sympathise. Then it is they're most dangerous. Their idea is that you shall do a great lot and get a great lot of money. Their great nobleness and virtue, their exemplary conscientiousness as British females, is in keeping you up to that. My wife makes all my bargains with my publishers for me, and has done so for twenty years. She does it consummately well—that's why I'm really pretty well off. Aren't you the father of their innocent babes, and will you withhold from them their natural sustenance? You asked me the other night if they're not an immense incentive. Of course they are—there's no doubt of that!"

Paul turned it over: it took, from eyes he had never felt open so wide, so much looking at. "For myself I've an idea I need incentives."

"Ah well then, *n'en parlons plus!*" his companion handsomely smiled.

"You are an incentive, I maintain," the young man went

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

on. "You don't affect me in the way you'd apparently like to. Your great success is what I see—the pomp of Ennismore Gardens!"

"Success?"—St. George's eyes had a cold fine light. "Do you call it success to be spoken of as you'd speak of me if you were sitting here with another artist—a young man intelligent and sincere like yourself? Do you call it success to make you blush—as you *would* blush!—if some foreign critic (some fellow, of course I mean, who should know what he was talking about and should have shown you he did, as foreign critics like to show it) were to say to you: 'He's the one, in this country, whom they consider the most perfect, isn't he?' Is it success to be the occasion of a young Englishman's having to stammer as you would have to stammer at such a moment for old England? No, no; success is to have made people wriggle to another tune. Do try it!"

Paul continued all gravely to glow. "Try what?"

"Try to do some really good work."

"Oh I want to, heaven knows!"

"Well, you can't do it without sacrifices—don't believe that for a moment," the Master said. "I've made none. I've had everything. In other words I've missed everything."

"You've had the full rich masculine human general life, with all the responsibilities and duties and burdens and sorrows and joys—all the domestic and social initiations and complications. They must be immensely suggestive, immensely amusing," Paul anxiously submitted.

"Amusing?"

"For a strong man—yes."

"They've given me subjects without number, if that's what you mean; but they've taken away at the same time the power to use them. I've touched a thousand things, but which one of them have I turned into gold? The artist has to do only with that—he knows nothing of any baser metal. I've led the life of the world, with my wife and my progeny; the clumsy conventional expensive materialised vulgarised brutalised life of London. We've got everything handsome, even a carriage—we're perfect Philistines and prosperous hospitable eminent people. But, my dear fellow, don't try to stultify yourself and pretend you don't know what we *haven't* got. It's bigger than all the rest. Between artists—come!" the Master wound up. "You know as well as you sit there that you'd put a pistol-ball into your brain if you had written my books!"

It struck his listener that the tremendous talk promised by

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

him at Summersoft had indeed come off, and with a promptitude, a fulness, with which the latter's young imagination had scarcely reckoned. His impression fairly shook him and he throbbed with the excitement of such deep soundings and such strange confidences. He throbbed indeed with the conflict of his feelings—bewilderment and recognition and alarm, enjoyment and protest and assent, all commingled with tenderness (and a kind of shame in the participation) for the sores and bruises exhibited by so fine a creature, and with a sense of the tragic secret nursed under his trappings. The idea of *his*, Paul Overt's becoming the occasion of such an act of humility made him flush and pant, at the same time that his consciousness was in certain directions too much alive not to swallow—and not intensely to taste—every offered spoonful of the revelation. It had been his odd fortune to blow upon the deep waters, to make them surge and break in waves of strange eloquence. But how couldn't he give out a passionate contradiction of his host's last extravagance, how couldn't he enumerate to him the parts of his work he loved, the splendid things he had found in it, beyond the compass of any other writer of the day? St. George listened a while, courteously; then he said, laying his hand on his visitor's: "That's all very well; and if your idea's to do nothing better there's no reason you shouldn't have as many good things as I—as many human and material appendages, as many sons or daughters, a wife with as many gowns, a house with as many servants, a stable with as many horses, a heart with as many aches." The Master got up when he had spoken thus—he stood a moment—near the sofa looking down on his agitated pupil. "Are you possessed of any property?" it occurred to him to ask.

"None to speak of."

"Oh well then there's no reason why you shouldn't make a goodish income—if you set about it the right way. Study *me* for that—study me well. You may really have horses."

Paul sat there some minutes without speaking. He looked straight before him—he turned over many things. His friend had wandered away, taking up a parcel of letters from the table where the roll of proofs had lain. "What was the book Mrs. St. George made you burn—the one she didn't like?" our young man brought out.

"The book she made me burn—how did you know that?" The Master looked up from his letters quite without the facial convulsion the pupil had feared.

"I heard her speak of it at Summersoft."

"Ah yes—she's proud of it. I don't know—it was rather good."

"What was it about?"

"Let me see." And he seemed to make an effort to remember. "Oh yes—it was about myself." Paul gave an irrepressible groan for the disappearance of such a production, and the elder man went on: "Oh but *you* should write it—*you* should do me." And he pulled up—from the restless motion that had come upon him; his fine smile a generous glare. "There's a subject, my boy: no end of stuff in it!"

Again Paul was silent, but it was all tormenting. "Are there no women who really understand—who can take part in a sacrifice?"

"How can they take part? They themselves are the sacrifice. They're the idol and the altar and the flame."

"Isn't there even *one* who sees further?" Paul continued.

For a moment St. George made no answer; after which, having torn up his letters, he came back to the point all ironic. "Of course I know the one you mean. But not even Miss Fancourt."

"I thought you admired her so much."

"It's impossible to admire her more. Are you in love with her?" St. George asked.

"Yes," Paul Overt presently said.

"Well then give it up."

Paul stared. "Give up my 'love'?"

"Bless me, no. Your idea." And then as our hero but still gazed: "The one you talked with her about. The idea of a decent perfection."

"She'd help it—she'd help it!" the young man cried.

"For about a year—the first year, yes. After that she'd be as a millstone round its neck."

Paul frankly wondered. "Why she has a passion for the real thing, for good work—for everything you and I care for most."

"'You and I' is charming, my dear fellow!" his friend laughed. "She has it indeed, but she'd have a still greater passion for her children—and very proper too. She'd insist on everything's being made comfortable, advantageous, propitious for them. That isn't the artist's business."

"The artist—the artist! Isn't he a man all the same?"

St. George had a grand grimace. "I mostly think not. You know as well as I what he has to do: the concentration, the finish, the independence he must strive for from the moment he begins to wish his work really decent. Ah my young friend, his relation to women, and especially to the one he's most intimately concerned with, is at the mercy of the damning fact that whereas he can

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

in the nature of things have but one standard, they have about fifty. That's what makes them so superior," St. George amusingly added. "Fancy an artist with a change of standards as you'd have a change of shirts or of dinner-plates. To *do* it—to do it and make it divine—is the only thing he has to think about. 'Is it done or not?' is his only question. Not 'Is it done as well as a proper solicitude for my dear little family will allow?' He has nothing to do with the relative—he has only to do with the absolute; and a dear little family may represent a dozen relatives."

"Then you don't allow him the common passions and affections of men?" Paul asked.

"Hasn't he a passion, an affection, which includes all the rest? Besides, let him have all the passions he likes—if he only keeps his independence. He must be able to be poor."

Paul slowly got up. "Why then did you advise me to make up to her?"

St. George laid his hand on his shoulder. "Because she'd make a splendid wife! And I hadn't read you then."

The young man had a strained smile. "I wish you had left me alone!"

"I didn't know that that wasn't good enough for you," his host returned.

"What a false position, what a condemnation of the artist, that he's a mere disfranchised monk and can produce his effect only by giving up personal happiness. What an arraignment of art!" Paul went on with a trembling voice.

"Ah you don't imagine by chance that I'm defending art? 'Arraignment'—I should think so! Happy the societies in which it hasn't made its appearance, for from the moment it comes they have a consuming ache, they have an incurable corruption, in their breast. Most assuredly is the artist in a false position! But I thought we were taking him for granted. Pardon me," St. George continued; "'Ginistrella' made me!"

Paul stood looking at the floor—one o'clock struck, in the stillness, from a neighbouring church-tower. "Do you think she'd ever look at me?" he put to his friend at last.

"Miss Fancourt—as a suitor? Why shouldn't I think it? That's why I've tried to favour you—I've had a little chance or two of bettering your opportunity."

"Forgive my asking you, but do you mean by keeping away yourself?" Paul said with a blush.

"I'm an old idiot—my place isn't there," St. George stated gravely.

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

"I'm nothing yet, I've no fortune ; and there must be so many others," his companion pursued.

The Master took this considerably in, but made little of it. "You're a gentleman and a man of genius. I think you might do something."

"But if I must give that up—the genius ? "

"Lots of people, you know, think I've kept mine," St. George wonderfully grinned.

"You've a genius for mystification !" Paul declared ; but grasping his hand gratefully in attenuation of this judgement.

"Poor dear boy, I do worry you ! But try, try, all the same. I think your chances are good and you'll win a great prize."

Paul held fast the other's hand a minute ; he looked into the strange deep face. "No, I *am* an artist—I can't help it ! "

"Ah show it then !" St. George pleadingly broke out. "Let me see before I die the thing I most want, the thing I yearn for : a life in which the passion—ours—is really intense. If you can be rare don't fail of it ! Think what it is—how it counts—how it lives ! "

They had moved to the door and he had closed both his hands over his companion's. Here they paused again and our hero breathed deep. "I want to live ! "

"In what sense ? "

"In the greatest."

"Well then stick to it—see it through."

"With your sympathy—your help ? "

"Count on that—you'll be a great figure to me. Count on my highest appreciation, my devotion. You'll give me satisfaction—if that has any weight with you." After which, as Paul appeared still to waver, his host added : "Do you remember what you said to me at Summersoft ? "

"Something infatuated, no doubt ! "

"'I'll do anything in the world you tell me.' You said that."

"And you hold me to it ? "

"Ah what am I ? " the Master expressively sighed.

"Lord what things I shall have to do ! " Paul almost moaned as he departed.

6

"It goes on too much abroad—hang abroad !" These or something like them had been the Master's remarkable words in relation to the action of "Ginistrella" ; and yet, though they

had made a sharp impression on the author of that work, like almost all spoken words from the same source, he a week after the conversation I have noted left England for a long absence and full of brave intentions. It is not a perversion of the truth to pronounce that encounter the direct cause of his departure. If the oral utterance of the eminent writer had the privilege of moving him deeply it was especially on his turning it over at leisure, hours and days later, that it appeared to yield him its full meaning and exhibit its extreme importance. He spent the summer in Switzerland and, having in September begun a new task, determined not to cross the Alps till he should have made a good start. To this end he returned to a quiet corner he knew well, on the edge of the Lake of Geneva and within sight of the towers of Chillon : a region and a view for which he had an affection that sprang from old associations and was capable of mysterious revivals and refreshments. Here he lingered late, till the snow was on the nearer hills, almost down to the limit to which he could climb when his stint, on the shortening afternoons, was performed. The autumn was fine, the lake was blue and his book took form and direction. These felicities, for the time, embroidered his life, which he suffered to cover him with its mantle. At the end of six weeks he felt he had learnt St. George's lesson by heart, had tested and proved its doctrine. Nevertheless he did a very inconsistent thing : before crossing the Alps he wrote to Marian Fancourt. He was aware of the perversity of this act, and it was only as a luxury, an amusement, the reward of a strenuous autumn, that he justified it. She had asked of him no such favour when, shortly before he left London, three days after their dinner in Ennismore Gardens, he went to take leave of her. It was true she had had no ground—he hadn't named his intention of absence. He had kept his counsel for want of due assurance : it was that particular visit that was, the next thing, to settle the matter. He had paid the visit to see how much he really cared for her, and quick departure, without so much as an explicit farewell, was the sequel to this enquiry, the answer to which had created within him a deep yearning. When he wrote her from Clarens he noted that he owed her an explanation (more than three months after !) for not having told her what he was doing.

She replied now briefly but promptly, and gave him a striking piece of news : that of the death, a week before, of Mrs. St. George. This exemplary woman had succumbed, in the country, to a violent attack of inflammation of the lungs—he would remember that for a long time she had been delicate. Miss

Fancourt added that she believed her husband overwhelmed by the blow ; he would miss her too terribly—she had been everything in life to him. Paul Overt, on this, immediately wrote to St. George. He would from the day of their parting have been glad to remain in communication with him, but had hitherto lacked the right excuse for troubling so busy a man. Their long nocturnal talk came back to him in every detail, but this was no bar to an expression of proper sympathy with the head of the profession, for hadn't that very talk made it clear that the late accomplished lady was the influence that ruled his life ? What catastrophe could be more cruel than the extinction of such an influence ? This was to be exactly the tone taken by St. George in answering his young friend upwards of a month later. He made no allusion of course to their important discussion. He spoke of his wife as frankly and generously as if he had quite forgotten that occasion, and the feeling of deep bereavement was visible in his words. " She took everything off my hands—off my mind. She carried on our life with the greatest art, the rarest devotion, and I was free, as few men can have been, to drive my pen, to shut myself up with my trade. This was a rare service—the highest she could have rendered me. Would I could have acknowledged it more fitly ! "

A certain bewilderment, for our hero, disengaged itself from these remarks : they struck him as a contradiction, a retraction, strange on the part of a man who hadn't the excuse of witlessness. He had certainly not expected his correspondent to rejoice in the death of his wife, and it was perfectly in order that the rupture of a tie of more than twenty years should have left him sore. But if she had been so clear a blessing what in the name of consistency had the dear man meant by turning *him* upside down that night—by dosing him to that degree, at the most sensitive hour of his life, with the doctrine of renunciation ? If Mrs. St. George was an irreparable loss, then her husband's inspired advice had been a bad joke and renunciation was a mistake. Overt was on the point of rushing back to London to show that, for his part, he was perfectly willing to consider it so, and he went so far as to take the manuscript of the first chapters of his new book out of his table-drawer, to insert it into a pocket of his portmanteau. This led to his catching a glimpse of certain pages he hadn't looked at for months, and that accident, in turn, to his being struck with the high promise they revealed—a rare result of such retrospections, which it was his habit to avoid as much as possible : they usually brought home to him that the glow of composition might be a purely

subjective and misleading emotion. On this occasion a certain belief in himself disengaged itself whimsically from the serried erasures of his first draft, making him think it best after all to pursue his present trial to the end. If he could write as well under the rigour of privation it might be a mistake to change the conditions before that spell had spent itself. He would go back to London, of course, but he would go back only when he should have finished his book. This was the vow he privately made, restoring his manuscript to the table-drawer. It may be added that it took him a long time to finish his book, for the subject was as difficult as it was fine, and he was literally embarrassed by the fulness of his notes. Something within him warned him that he must make it supremely good—otherwise he should lack, as regards his private behaviour, a handsome excuse. He had a horror of this deficiency and found himself as firm as need be on the question of the lamp and the file. He crossed the Alps at last and spent the winter, the spring, the ensuing summer, in Italy, where still, at the end of a twelvemonth, his task was unachieved. "Stick to it—see it through": this general injunction of St. George's was good also for the particular case. He applied it to the utmost, with the result that when in its slow order the summer had come round again he felt he had given all that was in him. This time he put his papers into his portmanteau, with the address of his publisher attached, and took his way northward.

He had been absent from London for two years—two years which, seeming to count as more, had made such a difference in his own life—through the production of a novel far stronger, he believed, than "*Ginistrella*"—that he turned out into Piccadilly, the morning after his arrival, with a vague expectation of changes, of finding great things had happened. But there were few transformations in Piccadilly—only three or four big red houses where there had been low black ones—and the brightness of the end of June peeped through the rusty railings of the Green Park and glittered in the varnish of the rolling carriages as he had seen it in other, more cursory Junes. It was a greeting he appreciated; it seemed friendly and pointed, added to the exhilaration of his finished book, of his having his own country and the huge oppressive amusing city that suggested everything, that contained everything, under his hand again. "Stay at home and do things here—do subjects we can measure," St. George had said; and now it struck him he should ask nothing better than to stay at home for ever. Late in the afternoon he took his way to Manchester Square, looking out for a number he hadn't forgotten. Miss Fancourt, however, was not at home, so that he

turned rather dejectedly from the door. His movement brought him face to face with a gentleman just approaching it and recognised on another glance as Miss Fancourt's father. Paul saluted this personage, and the General returned the greeting with his customary good manner—a manner so good, however, that you could never tell whether it meant he placed you. The disappointed caller felt the impulse to address him; then, hesitating, became both aware of having no particular remark to make, and convinced that though the old soldier remembered him he remembered him wrong. He therefore went his way without computing the irresistible effect his own evident recognition would have on the General, who never neglected a chance to gossip. Our young man's face was expressive, and observation seldom let it pass. He hadn't taken ten steps before he heard himself called after with a friendly semi-articulate "Er—I beg your pardon!" He turned round and the General, smiling at him from the porch, said: "Won't you come in? I won't leave you the advantage of me!" Paul declined to come in, and then felt regret, for Miss Fancourt, so late in the afternoon, might return at any moment. But her father gave him no second chance; he appeared mainly to wish not to have struck him as ungracious. A further look at the visitor had recalled something, enough at least to enable him to say: "You've come back, you've come back?" Paul was on the point of replying that he had come back the night before, but he suppressed, the next instant, this strong light on the immediacy of his visit and, giving merely a general assent, alluded to the young lady he deplored not having found. He had come late in the hope she would be in. "I'll tell her—I'll tell her," said the old man; and then he added quickly, gallantly: "You'll be giving us something new? It's a long time, isn't it?" Now he remembered him right.

"Rather long. I'm very slow," Paul explained. "I met you at Summersoft a long time ago."

"Oh yes—with Henry St. George. I remember very well. Before his poor wife—" General Fancourt paused a moment, smiling a little less. "I dare say you know."

"About Mrs. St. George's death? Certainly—I heard at the time."

"Oh no, I mean—I mean he's to be married."

"Ah I've not heard that!" But just as Paul was about to add "To whom?" the General crossed his intention.

"When did you come back? I know you've been away—by my daughter. She was very sorry. You ought to give her something new."

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

"I came back last night," said our young man, to whom something had occurred which made his speech for the moment a little thick.

"Ah most kind of you to come so soon. Couldn't you turn up at dinner?"

"At dinner!" Paul just mechanically repeated, not liking to ask whom St. George was going to marry, but thinking only of that.

"There are several people, I believe. Certainly St. George. Or afterwards if you like better. I believe my daughter expects—" He appeared to notice something in the visitor's raised face (on his steps he stood higher) which led him to interrupt himself and the interruption gave him a momentary sense of awkwardness, from which he sought a quick issue. "Perhaps then you haven't heard she's to be married."

Paul gaped again. "To be married?"

"To Mr. St. George—it has just been settled. Odd marriage isn't it?" Our listener uttered no opinion on this point: he only continued to stare. "But I dare say it will do—she's so awfully literary!" said the General.

Paul had turned very red. "Oh it's a surprise—very interesting, very charming! I'm afraid I can't dine—so many thanks!"

"Well, you must come to the wedding!" cried the General. "Oh I remember that day at Summersoft. He's a great man, you know."

"Charming—charming!" Paul stammered for retreat. He shook hands with the General and got off. His face was red and he had the sense of its growing more and more crimson. All the evening at home—he went straight to his rooms and remained there dinnerless—his cheek burned at intervals as if it had been smitten. He didn't understand what had happened to him, what trick had been played him, what treachery practised. "None, none," he said to himself. "I've nothing to do with it. I'm out of it—it's none of my business." But that bewildered murmur was followed again and again by the incongruous ejaculations: "Was it a plan—was it a plan?" Sometimes he cried to himself, breathless, "Have I been duped, sold, swindled?" If at all, he was an absurd, an abject victim. It was as if he hadn't lost her till now. He had renounced her, yes; but that was another affair—that was a closed but not a locked door. Now he seemed to see the door quite slammed in his face. Did he expect her to wait—was she to give him his time like that: two years at a stretch? He didn't know what he had expected—he only knew what he hadn't. It wasn't this—it wasn't this. Mystification,

bitterness and wrath rose and boiled in him when he thought of the deference, the devotion, the credulity with which he had listened to St. George. The evening wore on and the light was long ; but even when it had darkened he remained without a lamp. He had flung himself on the sofa, where he lay through the hours with his eyes either closed or gazing at the gloom, in the attitude of a man teaching himself to bear something, to bear having been made a fool of. He had made it too easy—that idea passed over him like a hot wave. Suddenly, as he heard eleven o'clock strike, he jumped up, remembering what General Fancourt had said about his coming after dinner. He'd go—he'd see her at least ; perhaps he should see what it meant. He felt as if some of the elements of a hard sum had been given him and the others were wanting : he couldn't do his sum till he had got all his figures.

He dressed and drove quickly, so that by half-past eleven he was at Manchester Square. There were a good many carriages at the door—a party was going on ; a circumstance which at the last gave him a slight relief, for now he would rather see her in a crowd. People passed him on the staircase ; they were going away, going “on” with the hunted herdlike movement of London society at night. But sundry groups remained in the drawing room, and it was some minutes, as she didn't hear him announced, before he discovered and spoke to her. In this short interval he had seen St. George talking to a lady before the fireplace ; but he at once looked away, feeling unready for an encounter, and therefore couldn't be sure the author of “Shadowmere” noticed him. At all events he didn't come over ; though Miss Fancourt did as soon as she saw him—she almost rushed at him, smiling rustling radiant beautiful. He had forgotten what her head, what her face offered to the sight ; she was in white, there were gold figures on her dress and her hair was a casque of gold. He saw in a single moment that she was happy, happy with an aggressive splendour. But she wouldn't speak to him of that, she would speak only of himself.

“I'm so delighted ; my father told me. How kind of you to come !” She struck him as so fresh and brave, while his eyes moved over her, that he said to himself irresistibly : “Why to *him*, why not to youth, to strength, to ambition, to a future ? Why, in her rich young force, to failure, to abdication, to superannuation ?” In his thought at that sharp moment he blasphemed even against all that had been left of his faith in the peccable Master. “I'm so sorry I missed you,” she went on. “My father told me. How charming of you to have come so soon !”

“Does that surprise you ?” Paul Overt asked.

"The first day? No, from you—nothing that's nice." She was interrupted by a lady who bade her good-night, and he seemed to read that it cost her nothing to speak to him in that tone; it was her old liberal lavish way, with a certain added amplitude that time had brought; and if this manner began to operate on the spot, at such a juncture in her history, perhaps in the other days too it had meant just as little or as much—a mere mechanical charity, with the difference now that she was satisfied, ready to give but in want of nothing. Oh she was satisfied—and why shouldn't she be? Why shouldn't she have been surprised at his coming the first day—for all the good she had ever got from him? As the lady continued to hold her attention Paul turned from her with a strange irritation in his complicated artistic soul and a sort of disinterested disappointment. She was so happy that it was almost stupid—a disproof of the extraordinary intelligence he had formerly found in her. Didn't she know how bad St. George could be, hadn't she recognised the awful thinness—? If she didn't she was nothing, and if she did why such an insolence of serenity? This question expired as our young man's eyes settled at last on the genius who had advised him in a great crisis. St. George was still before the chimney-piece, but now he was alone—fixed, waiting, as if he meant to stop after every one—and he met the clouded gaze of the young friend so troubled as to the degree of his right (the right his resentment would have enjoyed) to regard himself as a victim. Somehow the ravage of the question was checked by the Master's radiance. It was as fine in its way as Marian Fancourt's, it denoted the happy human being; but also it represented to Paul Overt that the author of "Shadowmere" had now definitely ceased to count—ceased to count as a writer. As he smiled a welcome across the place he was almost banal, was almost smug. Paul fancied that for a moment he hesitated to make a movement, as if for all the world he *had* his bad conscience; then they had already met in the middle of the room and had shaken hands—expressively, cordially on St. George's part. With which they had passed back together to where the elder man had been standing, while St. George said: "I hope you're never going away again. I've been dining here; the General told me." He was handsome, he was young, he looked as if he had still a great fund of life. He bent the friendliest, most unconfessing eyes on his disciple of a couple of years before; asked him about everything, his health, his plans, his late occupations, the new book. "When will it be out—soon, soon, I hope? Splendid, eh? That's right; you're a comfort, you're a,

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

luxury! I've read you all over again these last six months." Paul waited to see if he would tell him what the General had told him in the afternoon and what Miss Fancourt, verbally at least, of course hadn't. But as it didn't come out he at last put the question.

"Is it true, the great news I hear—that you're to be married?"

"Ah you *have* heard it then?"

"Didn't the General tell you?" Paul asked.

The Master's face was wonderful. "Tell me what?"

"That he mentioned it to me this afternoon?"

"My dear fellow, I don't remember. We've been in the midst of people. I'm sorry, in that case, that I lose the pleasure, myself, of announcing to you a fact that touches me so nearly. It is a fact, strange as it may appear. It has only just become one. Isn't it ridiculous?" St. George made this speech without confusion, but on the other hand, so far as our friend could judge, without latent impudence. It struck his interlocutor that, to talk so comfortably and coolly, he must simply have forgotten what had passed between them. His next words, however, showed he hadn't, and they produced, as an appeal to Paul's own memory, an effect which would have been ludicrous if it hadn't been cruel. "Do you recall the talk we had at my house that night, into which Miss Fancourt's name entered? I've often thought of it since."

"Yes; no wonder you said what you did"—Paul was careful to meet his eyes.

"In the light of the present occasion? Ah but there was no light then. How could I have foreseen this hour?"

"Didn't you think it probable?"

"Upon my honour, no," said Henry St. George. "Certainly I owe you that assurance. Think how my situation has changed."

"I see—I see," our young man murmured.

His companion went on as if, now that the subject had been broached, he was, as a person of imagination and tact, quite ready to give every satisfaction—being both by his genius and his method so able to enter into everything another might feel. "But it's not only that; for honestly, at my age, I never dreamed—a widower with big boys and with so little else! It has turned out differently from anything one could have dreamed, and I'm fortunate beyond all measure. She has been so free, and yet she consents. Better than any one else perhaps—for I remember how you liked her before you went away, and how she liked you—you can intelligently congratulate me."

"She has been so free!" Those words made a great impression on Paul Overt, and he almost writhed under that irony in them

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

as to which it so little mattered whether it was designed or casual. Of course she had been free, and appreciably perhaps by his own act ; for wasn't the Master's allusion to her having liked him a part of the irony too ? " I thought that by your theory you disapproved of a writer's marrying."

" Surely—surely. But you don't call me a writer ? "

" You ought to be ashamed," said Paul.

" Ashamed of marrying again ? "

" I won't say that—but ashamed of your reasons."

The elder man beautifully smiled. " You must let me judge of them, my good friend."

" Yes ; why not ? For you judged wonderfully of mine."

The tone of these words appeared suddenly, for St. George, to suggest the unsuspected. He stared as if divining a bitterness.

" Don't you think I've been straight ? "

" You might have told me at the time perhaps."

" My dear fellow, when I say I couldn't pierce futurity— ! "

" I mean afterwards."

The Master wondered. " After my wife's death ? "

" When this idea came to you."

" Ah never, never ! I wanted to save you, rare and precious as you are."

Poor Overt looked hard at him. " Are you marrying Miss Fancourt to save me ? "

" Not absolutely, but it adds to the pleasure. I shall be the making of you," St. George smiled. " I was greatly struck, after our talk, with the brave devoted way you quitted the country, and still more perhaps with your force of character in remaining abroad. You're very strong—you're wonderfully strong."

Paul tried to sound his shining eyes ; the strange thing was that he seemed sincere—not a mocking fiend. He turned away, and as he did so heard the Master say something about his giving them all the proof, being the joy of his old age. He faced him again, taking another look. " Do you mean to say you've stopped writing ? "

" My dear fellow, of course I have. It's too late. Didn't I tell you ? "

" I can't believe it ! "

" Of course you can't—with your own talent ! No, no ; for the rest of my life I shall only read *you*."

" Does she know that—Miss Fancourt ? "

" She will—she will." Did he mean this, our young man wondered, as a covert intimation that the assistance he should derive from that young lady's fortune, moderate as it was, would

make the difference of putting it in his power to cease to work ungratefully an exhausted vein? Somehow, standing there in the ripeness of his successful manhood, he didn't suggest that any of his veins were exhausted. "Don't you remember the moral I offered myself to you that night as pointing?" St. George continued. "Consider at any rate the warning I am at present."

This was too much—he *was* the mocking fiend. Paul turned from him with a mere nod for good-night and the sense in a sore heart that he might come back to him and his easy grace, his fine way of arranging things, some time in the far future, but couldn't fraternise with him now. It was necessary to his soreness to believe for the hour in the intensity of his grievance—all the more cruel for its not being a legal one. It was doubtless in the attitude of hugging this wrong that he descended the stairs without taking leave of Miss Fancourt, who hadn't been in view at the moment he quitted the room. He was glad to get out into the honest dusky unsophisticating night, to move fast, to take his way home on foot. He walked a long time, going astray, paying no attention. He was thinking of too many other things. His steps recovered their direction, however, and at the end of an hour he found himself before his door in the small inexpensive empty street. He lingered, questioning himself still before going in, with nothing around and above him but moonless blackness, a bad lamp or two and a few far-away dim stars. To these last faint features he raised his eyes; he had been saying to himself that he should have been "sold" indeed, diabolically sold, if now, on his new foundation, at the end of a year, St. George were to put forth something of his prime quality—something of the type of "Shadowmcre" and finer than his finest. Greatly as he admired his talent Paul literally hoped such an incident wouldn't occur; it seemed to him just then that he shouldn't be able to bear it. His late adviser's words were still in his ears—"You're very strong, wonderfully strong." Was he really? Certainly he would have to be, and it might a little serve for revenge. *Is he?* the reader may ask in turn, if his interest has followed the perplexed young man so far. The best answer to that perhaps is that he's doing his best, but that it's too soon to say. When the new book came out in the autumn Mr. and Mrs. St. George found it really magnificent. The former still has published nothing but Paul doesn't even yet feel safe. I may say for him, however, that if this event were to occur he would really be the very first to appreciate it: which is perhaps a proof that the Master was essentially right and that Nature had dedicated him to intellectual, not to personal passion.

THE FIGURE IN THE CARPET

I

I HAD done a few things and earned a few pence—I had perhaps even had time to begin to think I was finer than was perceived by the patronising ; but when I take the little measure of my course (a fidgety habit, for it's none of the longest yet) I count my real start from the evening George Corvick, breathless and worried, came in to ask me a service. He had done more things than I, and earned more pence, though there were chances for cleverness I thought he sometimes missed. I could only however that evening declare to him that he never missed one for kindness. There was almost rapture in hearing it proposed to me to prepare for *The Middle*, the organ of our lucubrations, so called from the position in the week of its day of appearance, an article for which he had made himself responsible and of which, tied up with a stout string, he laid on my table the subject. I pounced upon my opportunity—that is on the first volume of it—and paid scant attention to my friend's explanation of his appeal. What explanation could be more to the point than my obvious fitness for the task ? I had written on Hugh Vereker, but never a word in *The Middle*, where my dealings were mainly with the ladies and the minor poets. This was his new novel, an advance copy, and whatever much or little it should do for his reputation I was clear on the spot as to what it should do for mine. Moreover if I always read him as soon as I could get hold of him I had a particular reason for wishing to read him now : I had accepted an invitation to Bridges for the following Sunday, and it had been mentioned in Lady Jane's note that Mr. Vereker was to be there. I was young enough for a flutter at meeting a man of his renown, and innocent enough to believe the occasion would demand the display of an acquaintance with his "last."

Corvick, who had promised a review of it, had not even had time to read it ; he had gone to pieces in consequence of news requiring—as on precipitate reflexion he judged—that he should catch the night-mail to Paris. He had had a telegram from Gwendolen Erme in answer to his letter offering to fly to her aid. I knew already about Gwendolen Erme ; I had never seen her, but I had my ideas, which were mainly to the effect that Corvick would marry her if her mother would only die. That lady

seemed now in a fair way to oblige him ; after some dreadful mistake about a climate or a "cure" she had suddenly collapsed on the return from abroad. Her daughter, unsupported and alarmed, desiring to make a rush for home but hesitating at the risk, had accepted our friend's assistance, and it was my secret belief that at sight of him Mrs. Erme would pull round. His own belief was scarcely to be called secret ; it discernibly at any rate differed from mine. He had showed me Gwendolen's photograph with the remark that she wasn't pretty but was awfully interesting ; she had published at the age of nineteen a novel in three volumes, "Deep Down," about which, in *The Middle*, he had been really splendid. He appreciated my present eagerness, and undertook that the periodical in question should do no less ; then at the last, with his hand on the door, he said to me : "Of course you'll be all right, you know." Seeing I was a trifle vague he added : "I mean you won't be silly."

"Silly—about Vereker ! Why what do I ever find him but awfully clever ?"

"Well, what's that but silly ? What on earth does 'awfully clever' mean ? For God's sake try to get *at* him. Don't let him suffer by our arrangement. Speak of him, you know, if you can, as *I* should have spoken of him."

I wondered an instant. "You mean as far and away the biggest of the lot—that sort of thing ?"

Corvick almost groaned. "Oh you know, I don't put them back to back that way ; it's the infancy of art ! But he gives me a pleasure so rare ; the sense of"—he mused a little—"something or other."

I wondered again. "The sense, pray, of what ?"

"My dear man, that's just what I want *you* to say !"

Even before he had banged the door I had begun, book in hand, to prepare myself to say it. I sat up with Vereker half the night ; Corvick couldn't have done more than that. He was awfully clever—I stuck to that, but he wasn't a bit the biggest of the lot. I didn't allude to the lot, however ; I flattered myself that I emerged on this occasion from the infancy of art. "It's all right," they declared vividly at the office ; and when the number appeared I felt there was a basis on which I could meet the great man. It gave me confidence for a day or two—then that confidence dropped. I had fancied him reading it with relish, but if Corvick wasn't satisfied how could Vereker himself be ? I reflected indeed that the heat of the admirer was sometimes grosser even than the appetite of the scribe. Corvick at all events wrote me from Paris a little ill-humouredly. Mrs. Erme was

pulling round, and I hadn't at all said what Vereker gave him the sense of.

2

THE effect of my visit to Bridges was to turn me out for more profundity. Hugh Vereker, as I saw him there, was of a contact so void of angles that I blushed for the poverty of imagination involved in my small precautions. If he was in spirits it wasn't because he had read my review ; in fact on the Sunday morning I felt sure he hadn't read it, though *The Middle* had been out three days and bloomed, I assured myself, in the stiff garden of periodicals which gave one of the ormolu tables the air of a stand at a station. The impression he made on me personally was such that I wished him to read it, and I corrected to this end with a surreptitious hand what might be wanting in the careless conspicuity of the sheet. I'm afraid I even watched the result of my manoeuvre, but up to luncheon I watched in vain.

When afterwards, in the course of our gregarious walk, I found myself for half an hour, not perhaps without another manoeuvre, at the great man's side, the result of his affability was a still livelier desire that he shouldn't remain in ignorance of the peculiar justice I had done him. It wasn't that he seemed to thirst for justice ; on the contrary I hadn't yet caught in his talk the faintest grunt of a grudge—a note for which my young experience had already given me an ear. Of late he had had more recognition, and it was pleasant, as we used to say in *The Middle*, to see how it drew him out. He wasn't of course popular, but I judged one of the sources of his good humour to be precisely that his success was independent of that. He had none the less become in a manner the fashion ; the critics at least had put on a spurt and caught up with him. We had found out at last how clever he was, and he had had to make the best of the loss of his mystery. I was strongly tempted, as I walked beside him, to let him know how much of that unveiling was my act ; and there was a moment when I probably should have done so had not one of the ladies of our party, snatching a place at his other elbow, just then appealed to him in a spirit comparatively selfish. It was very discouraging : I almost felt the liberty had been taken with myself.

I had had on my tongue's end, for my own part, a phrase or two about the right word at the right time ; but later on I was glad not to have spoken, for when on our return we clustered at tea I perceived Lady Jane, who had not been out with us, brandishing

The Middle with her longest arm. She had taken it up at her leisure ; she was delighted with what she had found, and I saw that, as a mistake in a man may often be a felicity in a woman, she would practically do for me what I hadn't been able to do for myself. "Some sweet little truths that needed to be spoken," I heard her declare, thrusting the paper at rather a bewildered couple by the fireplace. She grabbed it away from them again on the reappearance of Hugh Vereker, who after our walk had been upstairs to change something. "I know you don't in general look at this kind of thing, but it's an occasion really for doing so. You *haven't* seen it? Then you must. The man has actually got *at* you, at what *I* always feel, you know." Lady Jane threw into her eyes a look evidently intended to give an idea of what she always felt ; but she added that she couldn't have expressed it. The man in the paper expressed it in a striking manner. "Just see there, and there, where I've dashed it, how he brings it out." She had literally marked for him the brightest patches of my prose, and if I was a little amused Vereker himself may well have been. He showed how much he was when before us all Lady Jane wanted to read something aloud. I liked at any rate the way he defeated her purpose by jerking the paper affectionately out of her clutch. He'd take it upstairs with him and look at it on going to dress. He did this half an hour later—I saw it in his hand when he repaired to his room. That was the moment at which, thinking to give her pleasure, I mentioned to Lady Jane that I was the author of the review. I did give her pleasure, I judged, but perhaps not quite so much as I had expected. If the author was "only me" the thing didn't seem quite so remarkable. Hadn't I had the effect rather of diminishing the lustre of the article than of adding to my own? Her ladyship was subject to the most extraordinary drops. It didn't matter ; the only effect I cared about was the one it would have on Vereker up there by his bedroom fire.

At dinner I watched for the signs of this impression, tried to fancy some happier light in his eyes ; but to my disappointment Lady Jane gave me no chance to make sure. I had hoped she'd call triumphantly down the table, publicly demand if she hadn't been right. The party was large—there were people from outside as well, but I had never seen a table long enough to deprive Lady Jane of a triumph. I was just reflecting in truth that this interminable board would deprive *me* of one when the guest next me, dear woman—she was Miss Poyle, the vicar's sister, a robust unmodulated person—had the happy inspiration and the unusual courage to address herself across it to Vereker, who

was opposite, but not directly, so that when he replied they were both leaning forward. She enquired, artless body, what he thought of Lady Jane's "panegyric," which she had read—not connecting it however with her right-hand neighbour; and while I strained my ear for his reply I heard him, to my stupefaction, call back gaily, his mouth full of bread: "Oh, it's all right—the usual twaddle!"

I had caught Vereker's glance as he spoke, but Miss Poyle's surprise was a fortunate cover for my own. "You mean he doesn't do you justice?" said the excellent woman.

Vereker laughed out, and I was happy to be able to do the same. "It's a charming article," he tossed us.

Miss Poyle thrust her chin half across the cloth. "Oh, you're so deep!" she drove home.

"As deep as the ocean! All I pretend is that the author doesn't see—" But a dish was at this point passed over his shoulder, and we had to wait while he helped himself.

"Doesn't see what?" my neighbour continued.

"Doesn't see anything."

"Dear me—how very stupid!"

"Not a bit," Vereker laughed again. "Nobody does."

The lady on his further side appealed to him, and Miss Poyle sank back to myself. "Nobody sees anything!" she cheerfully announced; to which I replied that I had often thought so too, but had somehow taken the thought for a proof on my own part of a tremendous eye. I didn't tell her the article was mine; and I observed that Lady Jane, occupied at the end of the table, had not caught Vereker's words.

I rather avoided him after dinner, for I confess he struck me as cruelly conceited, and the revelation was a pain. "The usual twaddle"—my acute little study! That one's admiration should have had a reserve or two could gall him to that point! I had thought him placid, and he was placid enough; such a surface was the hard polished glass that encased the bauble of his vanity. I was really ruffled, and the only comfort was that if nobody saw anything George Corvick was quite as much out of it as I. This comfort however was not sufficient, after the ladies had dispersed, to carry me in the proper manner—I mean in a spotted jacket and humming an air—into the smoking-room. I took my way in some dejection to bed; but in the passage I encountered Mr. Vereker, who had been up once more to change, coming out of his room. *He* was humming an air and had on a spotted jacket, and as soon as he saw me his gaiety gave a start.

"My dear young man," he exclaimed, "I'm so glad to lay hands on you! I'm afraid I most unwittingly wounded you by those words of mine at dinner to Miss Poyle. I learned but half an hour ago from Lady Jane that you're the author of the little notice in *The Middle*."

I protested that no bones were broken; but he moved with me to my own door, his hand, on my shoulder, kindly feeling for a fracture; and on hearing that I had come up to bed he asked leave to cross my threshold and just tell me in three words what his qualification of my remarks had represented. It was plain he really feared I was hurt, and the sense of his solicitude suddenly made all the difference to me. My cheap review fluttered off into space, and the best things I had said in it became flat enough beside the brilliancy of his being there. I can see him there still, on my rug, in the firelight and his spotted jacket, his fine clear face all bright with the desire to be tender to my youth. I don't know what he had at first meant to say, but I think the sight of my relief touched him, excited him, brought up words to his lips from far within. It was so these words presently conveyed to me something that, as I afterwards knew, he had never uttered to any one. I've always done justice to the generous impulse that made him speak; it was simply compunction for a snub unconsciously administered to a man of letters in a position inferior to his own, a man of letters moreover in the very act of praising him. To make the thing right he talked to me exactly as an equal and on the ground of what we both loved best. The hour, the place, the unexpectedness deepened the impression: he couldn't have done anything more intensely effective.

3.

"I DON'T quite know how to explain it to you," he said, "but it was the very fact that your notice of my book had a spice of intelligence, it was just your exceptional sharpness, that produced the feeling—a very old story with me, I beg you to believe—under the momentary influence of which I used in speaking to that good lady the words you so naturally resent. I don't read the things in the newspapers unless they're thrust upon me as that one was—it's always one's best friend who does it! But I used to read them sometimes—ten years ago. I dare say they were in general rather stupider then; at any rate it always struck me they missed my little point with a perfection exactly as admirable when they patted me on the back as when they

kicked me in the shins. Whenever since I've happened to have a glimpse of them they were still blazing away—still missing it, I mean, deliciously. *You* miss it, my dear fellow, with inimitable assurance; the fact of your being awfully clever and your article's being awfully nice doesn't make a hair's breadth of difference. It's quite with you rising young men," Vereker laughed, "that I feel most what a failure I am!"

I listened with keen interest; it grew keener as he talked. "*You* a failure—heavens! What then may your 'little point' happen to be?"

"Have I got to *tell* you, after all these years and labours?" There was something in the friendly reproach of this—jocosely exaggerated—that made me, as an ardent young seeker for truth, blush to the roots of my hair. I'm as much in the dark as ever, though I've grown used in a sense to my obtuseness; at that moment, however, Vereker's happy accent made me appear to myself, and probably to him, a rare dunce. I was on the point of exclaiming "Ah yes, don't tell me: for my honour, for that of the craft, don't!" when he went on in a manner that showed he had read my thought and had his own idea of the probability of our some day redeeming ourselves. "By my little point I mean—what shall I call it?—the particular thing I've written my books most *for*. Isn't there for every writer a particular thing of that sort, the thing that most makes him apply himself, the thing without the effort to achieve which he wouldn't write at all, the very passion of his passion, the part of the business in which, for him, the flame of art burns most intensely? Well, it's *that*!"

I considered a moment—that is I followed at a respectful distance, rather gasping. I was fascinated—easily, you'll say; but I wasn't going after all to be put off my guard. "Your description's certainly beautiful, but it doesn't make what you describe very distinct."

"I promise you it would be distinct if it should dawn on you at all." I saw that the charm of our topic overflowed for my companion into an emotion as lively as my own. "At any rate," he went on, "I can speak for myself: there's an idea in my work without which I wouldn't have given a straw for the whole job. It's the finest fullest intention of the lot, and the application of it has been, I think, a triumph of patience, of ingenuity. I ought to leave that to somebody else to say; but that nobody does say it is precisely what we're talking about. It stretches, this little trick of mine, from book to book, and everything else, comparatively, plays over the surface of it. The order, the form,

the texture of my books will perhaps some day constitute for the initiated a complete representation of it. So it's naturally the thing for the critic to look for. It strikes me," my visitor added, smiling, "even as the thing for the critic to find."

This seemed a responsibility indeed. "You call it a little trick?"

"That's only my little modesty. It's really an exquisite scheme."

"And you hold that you've carried the scheme out?"

"The way I've carried it out is the thing in life I think a bit well of myself for."

I had a pause. "Don't you think you ought—just a trifle—to assist the critic?"

"Assist him? What else have I done with every stroke of my pen? I've shouted my intention in his great blank face!" At this, laughing out again, Vereker laid his hand on my shoulder to show the allusion wasn't to my personal appearance.

"But you talk about the initiated. There must therefore, you see, be initiation."

"What else in heaven's name is criticism supposed to be?" I'm afraid I coloured at this too; but I took refuge in repeating that his account of his silver lining was poor in something or other that a plain man knows things by. "That's only because you've never had a glimpse of it," he returned. "If you had had one the element in question would soon have become practically all you'd see. To me it's exactly as palpable as the marble of this chimney. Besides, the critic just *isn't* a plain man: if he were, pray, what would he be doing in his neighbour's garden? You're anything but a plain man yourself, and the very *raison d'être* of you all is that you're little demons of subtlety. If my great affair's a secret, that's only because it's a secret in spite of itself—the amazing event has made it one. I not only never took the smallest precaution to keep it so, but never dreamed of any such accident. If I had I shouldn't in advance have had the heart to go on. As it was, I only became aware little by little, and meanwhile I had done my work."

"And now you quite like it?" I risked.

"My work?"

"Your secret. It's the same thing."

"Your guessing that," Vereker replied, "is a proof that you're as clever as I say!" I was encouraged by this to remark that he would clearly be pained to part with it, and he confessed that it was indeed with him now the great amusement of life. "I live almost to see if it will ever be detected." He looked at me for a

jesting challenge ; something far within his eyes seemed to peep out. " But I needn't worry—it won't ! "

" You fire me as I've never been fired," I declared ; " you make me determined to do or die." Then I asked : " Is it a kind of esoteric message ? "

His countenance fell at this—he put out his hand as if to bid me good-night. " Ah my dear fellow, it can't be described in cheap journalese ! "

I knew of course he'd be awfully fastidious, but our talk had made me feel how much his nerves were exposed. I was unsatisfied—I kept hold of his hand. " I won't make use of the expression then," I said, " in the article in which I shall eventually announce my discovery, though I dare say I shall have hard work to do without it. But meanwhile, just to hasten that difficult birth, can't you give a fellow a clue ? " I felt much more at my ease.

" My whole lucid effort gives him the clue—every page and line and letter. The thing's as concrete there as a bird in a cage, a bait on a hook, a piece of cheese in a mouse-trap. It's stuck into every volume as your foot is stuck into your shoe. It governs every line, it chooses every word, it dots every i, it places every comma."

I scratched my head. " Is it something in the style or something in the thought ? An element of form or an element of feeling ? "

He indulgently shook my hand again, and I felt my questions to be crude and my distinctions pitiful. " Good-night, my dear boy—don't bother about it. After all, you do like a fellow."

" And a little intelligence might spoil it ? " I still detained him.

He hesitated. " Well, you've got a heart in your body. Is that an element of form or an element of feeling ? What I contend that nobody has ever mentioned in my work is the organ of life."

" I see—it's some idea *about* life, some sort of philosophy. Unless it be," I added with the eagerness of a thought perhaps still happier, " some kind of game you're up to with your style, something you're after in the language. Perhaps it's a preference for the letter P ! " I ventured profanely to break out. " Papa, potatoes, prunes—that sort of thing ? " He was suitably indulgent : he only said I hadn't got the right letter. But his amusement was over ; I could see he was bored. There was nevertheless something else I had absolutely to learn. " Should you be able, pen in hand, to state it clearly yourself—to name it, phrase it, formulate it ? "

THE FIGURE IN THE CARPET

"Oh," he almost passionately sighed, "if I were only, pen in hand, one of *you* chaps!"

"That would be a great chance for you of course. But why should you despise us chaps for not doing what you can't do yourself?"

"Can't do?" He opened his eyes. "Haven't I done it in twenty volumes? I do it in my way," he continued. "Go *you* and don't do it in yours."

"Ours is so devilish difficult," I weakly observed.

"So's mine. We each choose our own. There's no compulsion. You won't come down and smoke?"

"No. I want to think this thing out."

"You'll tell me then in the morning that you've laid me bare?"

"I'll see what I can do; I'll sleep on it. But just one word more," I added. We had left the room—I walked again with him a few steps along the passage. "This extraordinary 'general intention,' as you call it—for that's the most vivid description I can induce you to make of it—is then, generally, a sort of buried treasure?"

His face lighted. "Yes, call it that, though it's perhaps not for me to do so."

"Nonsense!" I laughed. "You know you're hugely proud of it."

"Well, I didn't propose to tell you so; but it is the joy of my soul!"

"You mean it's a beauty so rare, so great?"

He waited a little again. "The loveliest thing in the world!" We had stopped, and on these words he left me; but at the end of the corridor, while I looked after him rather yearningly, he turned and caught sight of my puzzled face. It made him earnestly, indeed I thought quite anxiously, shake his head and wave his finger. "Give it up—give it up!"

This wasn't a challenge—it was fatherly advice. If I had had one of his books at hand I'd have repeated my recent act of faith—I'd have spent half the night with him. At three o'clock in the morning, not sleeping, remembering moreover how indispensable he was to Lady Jane, I stole down to the library with a candle. There wasn't, so far as I could discover, a line of his writing in the house.

RETURNING to town I feverishly collected them all ; I picked out each in its order and held it up to the light. This gave me a maddening month, in the course of which several things took place. One of these, the last, I may as well immediately mention, was that I acted on Vereker's advice : I renounced my ridiculous attempt. I could really make nothing of the business ; it proved a dead loss. After all I had always, as he had himself noted, liked him ; and what now occurred was simply that my new intelligence and vain preoccupation damaged my liking. I not only failed to run a general intention to earth, I found myself missing the subordinate intentions I had formerly enjoyed. His books didn't even remain the charming things they had been for me ; the exasperation of my search put me out of conceit of them. Instead of being a pleasure the more they became a resource the less ; for from the moment I was unable to follow up the author's hint I of course felt it a point of honour not to make use professionally of my knowledge of them. I *had* no knowledge—nobody had any. It was humiliating, but I could bear it—they only annoyed me now. At last they even bored me, and I accounted for my confusion—perversely, I allow—by the idea that Vereker had made a fool of me. The buried treasure was a bad joke, the general intention a monstrous pose.

The great point of it all is, however, that I told George Corvick what had befallen me and that my information had an immense effect upon him. He had at last come back, but so, unfortunately, had Mrs. Erme, and there was as yet, I could see, no question of his nuptials. He was immensely stirred up by the anecdote I had brought from Bridges ; it fell in so completely with the sense he had had from the first that there was more in Vereker than met the eye. When I remarked that the eye seemed what the printed page had been expressly invented to meet he immediately accused me of being spiteful because I had been foiled. Our commerce had always that pleasant latitude. The thing Vereker had mentioned to me was exactly the thing he, Corvick, had wanted me to speak of in my review. On my suggesting at last that with the assistance I had now given him he would doubtless be prepared to speak of it himself he admitted freely that before doing this there was more he must understand. What he would have said, had he reviewed the new book, was that there was evidently in the writer's inmost art something to *be* understood. I hadn't so

much as hinted at that : no wonder the writer hadn't been flattered ! I asked Corvick what he really considered he meant by his own supersubtlety, and, unmistakeably kindled, he replied : " It isn't for the vulgar—it isn't for the vulgar ! " He had hold of the tail of something ; he would pull hard, pull it right out. He pumped me dry on Vereker's strange confidence and, pronouncing me the luckiest of mortals, mentioned half a dozen questions he wished to goodness I had had the gumption to put. Yet on the other hand he didn't want to be told too much—it would spoil the fun of seeing what would come. The failure of *my* fun was at the moment of our meeting not complete, but I saw it ahead, and Corvick saw that I saw it. I, on my side, saw likewise that one of the first things he would do would be to rush off with my story to Gwendolen.

On the very day after my talk with him I was surprised by the receipt of a note from Hugh Vereker, to whom our encounter at Bridges had been recalled, as he mentioned, by his falling, in a magazine, on some article to which my signature was attached. " I read it with great pleasure," he wrote, " and remembered under its influence our lively conversation by your bedroom fire. The consequence of this has been that I begin to measure the temerity of my having saddled you with a knowledge that you may find something of a burden. Now that the fit's over I can't imagine how I came to be moved so much beyond my wont. I had never before mentioned, no matter in what state of expansion, the fact of my little secret, and I shall never speak of that mystery again. I was accidentally so much more explicit with you than it had ever entered into my game to be, that I find this game—I mean the pleasure of playing it—suffers considerably. In short, if you can understand it, I've rather spoiled my sport. I really don't want to give anybody what I believe you clever young men call the tip. That's of course a selfish solicitude, and I name it to you for what it may be worth to you. If you're disposed to humour me don't repeat my revelation. Think me demented—it's your right ; but don't tell anybody why."

The sequel to this communication was that as early on the morrow as I dared I drove straight to Mr. Vereker's door. He occupied in those years one of the honest old houses in Kensington Square. He received me immediately, and as soon as I came in I saw I hadn't lost my power to minister to his mirth. He laughed out at sight of my face, which doubtless expressed my perturbation. I had been indiscreet—my compunction was great. " I *have* told somebody," I panted, " and I'm sure that person will by this time have told somebody else ! It's a woman, into the bargain."

"The person you've told?"

"No, the other person. I'm quite sure he must have told her."

"For all the good it will do her—or do *me*! A woman will never find out."

"No, but she'll talk all over the place: she'll do just what you don't want."

Vereker thought a moment, but wasn't so disconcerted as I had feared: he felt that if the harm was done it only served him right. "It doesn't matter—don't worry."

"I'll do my best, I promise you, that your talk with me shall go no further."

"Very good; do what you can."

"In the meantime," I pursued, "George Corvick's possession of the tip may, on his part, really lead to something."

"That will be a brave day."

I told him about Corvick's cleverness, his admiration, the intensity of his interest in my anecdote; and without making too much of the divergence of our respective estimates mentioned that my friend was already of opinion that he saw much further into a certain affair than most people. He was quite as fired as I had been at Bridges. He was moreover in love with the young lady: perhaps the two together would puzzle something out.

Vereker seemed struck with this. "Do you mean they're to be married?"

"I dare say that's what it will come to."

"That may help them," he conceded, "but we must give them time!"

I spoke of my own renewed assault and confessed my difficulties; whereupon he repeated his former advice: "Give it up, give it up!" He evidently didn't think me intellectually equipped for the adventure. I stayed half an hour, and he was most good-natured, but I couldn't help pronouncing him a man of unstable moods. He had been free with me in a mood, he had repented in a mood, and now in a mood he had turned indifferent. This general levity helped me to believe that, so far as the subject of the tip went, there wasn't much in it. I contrived however to make him answer a few more questions about it, though he did so with visible impatience. For himself, beyond doubt, the thing we were all so blank about was vividly there. It was something, I guessed, in the primal plan, something like a complex figure in a Persian carpet. He highly approved of this image when I used it, and he used another himself. "It's the very string," he said, "that my pearls are strung on!" The reason of his note to me

had been that he really didn't want to give us a grain of succour—our density was a thing too perfect in its way to touch. He had formed the habit of depending on it, and if the spell was to break it must break by some force of its own. He comes back to me from that last occasion—for I was never to speak to him again—as a man with some safe preserve for sport. I wondered as I walked away where he had got *his* tip.

5

WHEN I spoke to George Corvick of the caution I had received he made me feel that any doubt of his delicacy would be almost an insult. He had instantly told Gwendolen, but Gwendolen's ardent response was in itself a pledge of discretion. The question would now absorb them and would offer them a pastime too precious to be shared with the crowd. They appeared to have caught instinctively at Vereker's high idea of enjoyment. Their intellectual pride, however, was not such as to make them indifferent to any further light I might throw on the affair they had in hand. They were indeed of the "artistic temperament," and I was freshly struck with my colleague's power to excite himself over a question of art. He'd call it letters, he'd call it life, but it was all one thing. In what he said I now seemed to understand that he spoke equally for Gwendolen, to whom, as soon as Mrs. Erme was sufficiently better to allow her a little leisure, he made a point of introducing me. I remember our going together one Sunday in August to a huddled house in Chelsea, and my renewed envy of Corvick's possession of a friend who had some light to mingle with his own. He could say things to her that I could never say to him. She had indeed no sense of humour and, with her pretty way of holding her head on one side, was one of those persons whom you want, as the phrase is, to shake, but who have learnt Hungarian by themselves. She conversed perhaps in Hungarian with Corvick; she had remarkably little English for his friend. Corvick afterwards told me that I had chilled her by my apparent indisposition to oblige them with the detail of what Vereker had said to me. I allowed that I felt I had given thought enough to that indication: hadn't I even made up my mind that it was vain and would lead nowhere? The importance they attached to it was irritating and quite envenomed my doubts.

That statement looks unamiable, and what probably happened was that I felt humiliated at seeing other persons deeply beguiled

by an experiment that had brought me only chagrin. I was out in the cold, while by the evening fire, under the lamp, they followed the chase for which I myself had sounded the horn. They did as I had done, only more deliberately and sociably—they went over their author from the beginning. There was no hurry, Corvick said—the future was before them and the fascination could only grow ; they would take him page by page, as they would take one of the classics, inhale him in slow draughts and let him sink all the way in. They would scarce have got so wound up, I think, if they hadn't been in love : poor Vereker's inner meaning gave them endless occasion to put and to keep their young heads together. None the less it represented the kind of problem for which Corvick had a special aptitude, drew out the particular pointed patience of which, had he lived, he would have given more striking and, it is to be hoped, more fruitful examples. He at least was, in Vereker's words, a little demon of subtlety. We had begun by disputing, but I soon saw that without my stirring a finger his infatuation would have its bad hours. He would bound off on false scents as I had done—he would clap his hands over new lights and see them blown out by the wind of the turned page. He was like nothing, I told him, but the maniacs who embrace some bedlamitical theory of the cryptic character of Shakespeare. To this he replied that if we had had Shakespeare's own word for his being cryptic he would at once have accepted it. The case there was altogether different—we had nothing but the word of Mr. Snooks. I returned that I was stupefied to see him attach such importance even to the word of Mr. Vereker. He wanted thereupon to know if I treated Mr. Vereker's word as a lie. I wasn't perhaps prepared, in my unhappy rebound, to go so far as that, but I insisted that till the contrary was proved I should view it as too fond an imagination. I didn't, I confess, say—I didn't at that time quite know—all I felt. Deep down, as Miss Erme would have said, I was uneasy, I was expectant. At the core of my disconcerted state—for my wonted curiosity lived in its ashes—was the sharpness of a sense that Corvick would at last probably come out somewhere. He made, in defence of his credulity, a great point of the fact that from of old, in his study of this genius, he had caught whiffs and hints of he didn't know what, faint wandering notes of a hidden music. That was just the rarity, that was the charm : it fitted so perfectly into what I reported.

If I returned on several occasions to the little house in Chelsea I dare say it was as much for news of Vereker as for news of Miss Erme's ailing parent. The hours spent there by Corvick were

present to my fancy as those of a chessplayer bent with a silent scowl, all the lamplit winter, over his board and his moves. As my imagination filled it out the picture held me fast. On the other side of the table was a ghostlier form, the faint figure of an antagonist good-humouredly but a little wearily secure—an antagonist who leaned back in his chair with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his fine clear face. Close to Corvick, behind him, was a girl who had begun to strike me as pale and wasted and even, on more familiar view, as rather handsome, and who rested on his shoulder and hung on his moves. He would take up a chessman and hold it poised a while over one of the little squares, and then would put it back in its place with a long sigh of disappointment. The young lady, at this, would slightly but uneasily shift her position and look across, very hard, very long, very strangely, at their dim participant. I had asked them at an early stage of the business if it mightn't contribute to their success to have some closer communication with him. The special circumstances would surely be held to have given me a right to introduce them. Corvick immediately replied that he had no wish to approach the altar before he had prepared the sacrifice. He quite agreed with our friend both as to the delight and as to the honour of the chase—he would bring down the animal with his own rifle. When I asked him if Miss Erme were as keen a shot he said after thinking : “ No, I'm ashamed to say she wants to set a trap. She'd give anything to see him ; she says she requires another tip. She's really quite morbid about it. But she must play fair—she *shan't* see him ! ” he emphatically added. I wondered if they hadn't even quarrelled a little on the subject—a suspicion not corrected by the way he more than once exclaimed to me : “ She's quite incredibly literary, you know—quite fantastically ! ” I remember his saying of her that she felt in italics and thought in capitals. “ Oh when I've run him to earth,” he also said, “ then, you know, I shall knock at his door. Rather—I beg you to believe. I'll have it from his own lips : ‘ Right you are, my boy ; you've done it this time ! ’ He shall crown me victor—with the critical laurel.”

Meanwhile he really avoided the chances London life might have given him of meeting the distinguished novelist ; a danger, however, that disappeared with Vereker's leaving England for an indefinite absence, as the newspapers announced—going to the south for motives connected with the health of his wife, which had long kept her in retirement. A year—more than a year—had elapsed since the incident at Bridges, but I had had no further sight of him. I think I was at bottom rather ashamed

—I hated to remind him that, though I had irremediably missed his point, a reputation for acuteness was rapidly overtaking me. This scruple led me a dance ; kept me out of Lady Jane's house, made me even decline, when in spite of my bad manners she was a second time so good as to make me a sign, an invitation to her beautiful seat. I once became aware of her under Vereker's escort at a concert, and was sure I was seen by them, but I slipped out without being caught. I felt, as on that occasion I splashed along in the rain, that I couldn't have done anything else ; and yet I remember saying to myself that it was hard, was even cruel. Not only had I lost the books, but I had lost the man himself : they and their author had been alike spoiled for me. I knew too which was the loss I most regretted. I had taken to the man still more than I had ever taken to the books.

6

Six months after our friend had left England George Corvick, who made his living by his pen, contracted for a piece of work which imposed on him an absence of some length and a journey of some difficulty, and his undertaking of which was much of a surprise to me. His brother-in-law had become editor of a great provincial paper, and the great provincial paper, in a fine flight of fancy, had conceived the idea of sending a "special commissioner" to India. Special commissioners had begun, in the "metropolitan press," to be the fashion, and the journal in question must have felt it had passed too long for a mere country cousin. Corvick had no hand, I knew, for the big brush of the correspondent, but that was his brother-in-law's affair, and the fact that a particular task was not in his line was apt to be with himself exactly a reason for accepting it. He was prepared to out-Herod the metropolitan press ; he took solemn precautions against priggishness, he exquisitely outraged taste. Nobody ever knew it—that offended principle was all his own. In addition to his expenses he was to be conveniently paid, and I found myself able to help him, for the usual fat book, to a plausible arrangement with the usual fat publisher. I naturally inferred that his obvious desire to make a little money was not unconnected with the prospect of a union with Gwendolen Erme. I was aware that her mother's opposition was largely addressed to his want of means and of lucrative abilities, but it so happened that, on my saying the last time I saw him something that bore on the question

of his separation from our young lady, he brought out with an emphasis that startled me : " Ah I'm not a bit engaged to her, you know ! "

" Not overtly," I answered, " because her mother doesn't like you. But I've always taken for granted a private understanding."

" Well, there *was* one. But there isn't now." That was all he said save something about Mrs. Erme's having got on her feet again in the most extraordinary way—a remark pointing, as I supposed, the moral that private understandings were of little use when the doctor didn't share them. What I took the liberty of more closely inferring was that the girl might in some way have estranged him. Well, if he had taken the turn of jealousy for instance it could scarcely be jealousy of me. In that case—over and above the absurdity of it—he wouldn't have gone away just to leave us together. For some time before his going we had indulged in no allusion to the buried treasure, and from his silence, which my reserve simply emulated, I had drawn a sharp conclusion. His courage had dropped, his ardour had gone the way of mine—this appearance at least he left me to scan. More than that he couldn't do ; he couldn't face the triumph with which I might have greeted an explicit admission. He needn't have been afraid, poor dear, for I had by this time lost all need to triumph. In fact I considered I showed magnanimity in not reproaching him with his collapse, for the sense of his having thrown up the game made me feel more than ever how much I at last depended on him. If Corvick had broken down I should never know ; no one would be of any use if *he* wasn't. It wasn't a bit true I had ceased to care for knowledge ; little by little my curiosity not only had begun to ache again, but had become the familiar torment of my days and my nights. There are doubtless people to whom torments of such an order appear hardly more natural than the contortions of disease ; but I don't after all know why I should in this connection so much as mention them. For the few persons, at any rate, abnormal or not, with whom my anecdote is concerned, literature was a game of skill, and skill meant courage, and courage meant honour, and honour meant passion, meant life. The stake on the table was of a special substance and our roulette the revolving mind, but we sat round the green board as intently as the grim gamblers at Monte Carlo. Gwendolen Erme, for that matter, with her white face and her fixed eyes, was of the very type of the lean ladies one had met in the temples of chance. I recognised in Corvick's absence that she made this analogy vivid. It was extravagant, I admit, the way

she lived for the art of the pen. Her passion visibly preyed on her, and in her presence I felt almost tepid. I got hold of "Deep Down" again : it was a desert in which she had lost herself, but in which too she had dug a wonderful hole in the sand—a cavity out of which Corvick had still more remarkably pulled her.

Early in March I had a telegram from her, in consequence of which I repaired immediately to Chelsea, where the first thing she said to me was : " He has got it, he has got it ! "

She was moved, as I could see, to such depths that she must mean the great thing. " Vereker's idea ? "

" His general intention. George has cabled from Bombay. "

She had the missive open there ; it was emphatic though concise. " Eureka. Immense. " That was all—he had saved the cost of the signature. I shared her emotion, but I was disappointed. " He doesn't say what it is. "

" How could he—in a telegram ? He'll write it. "

" But how does he know ? "

" Know it's the real thing ? Oh I'm sure that when you see it you do know. *Vera incessu patuit dea !* "

" It's you, Miss Erme, who are a ' dear ' for bringing me such news ! "—I went all lengths in my high spirits. " But fancy finding our goddess in the temple of Vishnu ! How strange of George to have been able to go into the thing again in the midst of such different and such powerful solicitations ! "

" He hasn't gone into it, I know ; it's the thing itself, let severely alone for six months, that has simply sprung out at him like a tigress out of the jungle. He didn't take a book with him—on purpose ; indeed he wouldn't have needed to—he knows every page, as I do, by heart. They all worked in him together, and some day somewhere, when he wasn't thinking, they fell, in all their superb intricacy, into the one right combination. The figure in the carpet came out. That's the way he knew it would come and the real reason—you didn't in the least understand, but I suppose I may tell you now—why he went and why I consented to his going. We knew the change would do it—that the difference of thought, of scene, would give the needed touch, the magic shake. We had perfectly, we had admirably calculated. The elements were all in his mind, and in the *secousse* of a new and intense experience they just struck light. " She positively struck light herself—she was literally, facially luminous. I stammered something about unconscious cerebration, and she continued : " He'll come right home—this will bring him. "

"To see Vereker, you mean?"

"To see Vereker—and to see *me*. Think what he'll have to tell me!"

I hesitated. "About India?"

"About fiddlesticks! About Vereker—about the figure in the carpet."

"But, as you say, we shall surely have that in a letter."

She thought like one inspired, and I remembered how Corvick had told me long before that her face was interesting. "Perhaps it can't be got into a letter if it's 'immense.'"

"Perhaps not if it's immense bosh. If he has hold of something that can't be got into a letter he hasn't hold of *the* thing. Vereker's own statement to me was exactly that the 'figure' *would* fit into a letter."

"Well, I cabled to George an hour ago—two words," said Gwendolen.

"Is it indiscreet of me to ask what they were?"

She hung fire, but at last brought them out. "'Angel write.'"

"Good!" I exclaimed, "I'll make it sure—I'll send him the same."

7

My words however were not absolutely the same—I put something instead of "angel"; and in the sequel my epithet seemed the more apt, for when eventually we heard from our traveller it was merely, it was thoroughly to be tantalised. He was magnificent in his triumph, he described his discovery as stupendous; but his ecstasy only obscured it—there were to be no particulars till he should have submitted his conception to the supreme authority. He had thrown up his commission, he had thrown up his book, he had thrown up everything but the instant need to hurry to Rapallo, on the Genoese shore, where Vereker was making a stay. I wrote him a letter which was to await him at Aden—I besought him to relieve my suspense. That he had found my letter was indicated by a telegram which, reaching me after weary days and in the absence of any answer to my laconic dispatch to him at Bombay, was evidently intended as a reply to both communications. Those few words were in familiar French, the French of the day, which Corvick often made use of to show he wasn't a prig. It had for some persons the opposite effect, but his message may fairly be paraphrased. "Have patience; I want to see, as it breaks on you, the face you'll

make!" "*Tellement envie de voir ta tête!*"—that was what I had to sit down with. I can certainly not be said to have sat down, for I seem to remember myself at this time as rattling constantly between the little house in Chelsea and my own. Our impatience, Gwendolen's and mine, was equal, but I kept hoping her light would be greater. We all spent during this episode, for people of our means, a great deal of money in telegrams and cabs, and I counted on the receipt of news from Rapallo immediately after the junction of the discoverer with the discovered. The interval seemed an age, but late one day I heard a hansom precipitated to my door with the crash engendered by a hint of liberality. I lived with my heart in my mouth and accordingly bounded to the window—a movement which gave me a view of a young lady erect on the footboard of the vehicle and eagerly looking up at my house. At sight of me she flourished a paper with a movement that brought me straight down, the movement with which, in melodramas, handkerchiefs and reprieves are flourished at the foot of the scaffold.

"Just seen Vereker—not a note wrong. Pressed me to bosom—keeps me a month." So much I read on her paper while the cabby dropped a grin from his perch. In my excitement I paid him profusely and in hers she suffered it; then as he drove away we started to walk about and talk. We had talked, heaven knows, enough before, but this was a wondrous lift. We pictured the whole scene at Rapallo, where he would have written, mentioning my name, for permission to call; that is I pictured it, having more material than my companion, whom I felt hang on my lips as we stopped on purpose before shop-windows we didn't look into. About one thing we were clear: if he was staying on for fuller communication we should at least have a letter from him that would help us through the dregs of delay. We understood his staying on, and yet each of us saw, I think, that the other hated it. The letter we were clear about arrived; it was for Gwendolen, and I called on her in time to save her the trouble of bringing it to me. She didn't read it out, as was natural enough; but she repeated to me what it chiefly embodied. This consisted of the remarkable statement that he'd tell her after they were married exactly what she wanted to know.

"Only *then*, when I'm his wife—not before," she explained. "It's tantamount to saying—isn't it?—that I must marry him straight off!" She smiled at me while I flushed with disappointment, a vision of fresh delay that made me at first unconscious

of my surprise. It seemed more than a hint that on me as well he would impose some tiresome condition. Suddenly, while she reported several more things from his letter, I remembered what he had told me before going away. He had found Mr. Vereker deliriously interesting and his own possession of the secret a real intoxication. The buried treasure was all gold and gems. Now that it was there it seemed to grow and grow before him ; it would have been, through all time and taking all tongues, one of the most wonderful flowers of literary art. Nothing, in especial, once you were face to face with it, could show for more consummately *done*. When once it came out it came out, was there with a splendour that made you ashamed ; and there hadn't been, save in the bottomless vulgarity of the age, with every one tasteless and tainted, every sense stopped, the smallest reason why it should have been overlooked. It was great, yet so simple, was simple, yet so great, and the final knowledge of it was an experience quite apart. He intimated that the charm of such an experience, the desire to drain it, in its freshness, to the last drop, was what kept him there close to the source. Gwendolen, frankly radiant as she tossed me these fragments, showed the elation of a prospect more assured than my own. That brought me back to the question of her marriage, prompted me to ask if what she meant by what she had just surprised me with was that she was under an engagement.

"Of course I am !" she answered. "Didn't you know it ?" She seemed astonished, but I was still more so, for Corvick had told me the exact contrary. I didn't mention this, however ; I only reminded her how little I had been on that score in her confidence, or even in Corvick's, and that moreover I wasn't in ignorance of her mother's interdict. At bottom I was troubled by the disparity of the two accounts ; but after a little I felt Corvick's to be the one I least doubted. This simply reduced me to asking myself if the girl had on the spot improvised an engagement—vamped up an old one or dashed off a new—in order to arrive at the satisfaction she desired. She must have had resources of which I was destitute, but she made her case slightly more intelligible by returning presently : "What the state of things has been is that we felt of course bound to do nothing in mamma's lifetime."

"But now you think you'll just dispense with mamma's consent ?"

"Ah it mayn't come to that !" I wondered what it might come to, and she went on : "Poor dear, she may swallow the dose. In fact, you know," she added with a laugh, "she really

must!”—a proposition of which, on behalf of every one concerned, I fully acknowledged the force.

8

NOTHING more vexatious had ever happened to me than to become aware before Corvick's arrival in England that I shouldn't be there to put him through. I found myself abruptly called to Germany by the alarming illness of my younger brother, who, against my advice, had gone to Munich to study, at the feet indeed of a great master, the art of portraiture in oils. The near relative who made him an allowance had threatened to withdraw it if he should, under specious pretexts, turn for superior truth to Paris—Paris being somehow, for a Cheltenham aunt, the school of evil, the abyss. I deplored this prejudice at the time, and the deep injury of it was now visible—first in the fact that it hadn't saved the poor boy, who was clever frail and foolish, from congestion of the lungs, and second in the greater break with London to which the event condemned me. I'm afraid that what was uppermost in my mind during several anxious weeks was the sense that if we had only been in Paris I might have run over to see Corvick. This was actually out of the question from every point of view: my brother, whose recovery gave us both plenty to do, was ill for three months, during which I never left him and at the end of which we had to face the absolute prohibition of a return to England. The consideration of climate imposed itself, and he was in no state to meet it alone. I took him to Meran and there spent the summer with him, trying to show him by example how to get back to work and nursing a rage of another sort that I tried *not* to show him.

The whole business proved the first of a series of phenomena so strangely interlaced that, taken together—which was how I had to take them—they formed as good an illustration as I can recall of the manner in which, for the good of his soul doubtless, fate sometimes deals with a man's avidity. These incidents certainly had larger bearings than the comparatively meagre consequence we are here concerned with—though I feel that consequence also a thing to speak of with some respect. It's mainly in such a light, I confess, at any rate, that the ugly fruit of my exile is at this hour present to me. Even at first indeed the spirit in which my avidity, as I have called it, made me regard that term owed no element of ease to the fact that before coming back from Rapallo George Corvick addressed me in a

way I objected to. His letter had none of the sedative action I must to-day profess myself sure he had wished to give it, and the march of occurrences was not so ordered as to make up for what it lacked. He had begun on the spot, for one of the quarterlies, a great last word on Vereker's writings, and this exhaustive study, the only one that would have counted, have existed, was to turn on the new light, to utter—oh, so quietly!—the unimagined truth. It was in other words to trace the figure in the carpet through every convolution, to reproduce it in every tint. The result, according to my friend, would be the greatest literary portrait ever painted, and what he asked of me was just to be so good as not to trouble him with questions till he should hang up his masterpiece before me. He did me the honour to declare that, putting aside the great sitter himself, all aloft in his indifference, I was individually the connoisseur he was most working for. I was therefore to be a good boy and not try to peep under the curtain before the show was ready: I should enjoy it all the more if I sat very still.

I did my best to sit very still, but I couldn't help giving a jump on seeing in *The Times*, after I had been a week or two in Munich and before, as I knew, Corvick had reached London, the announcement of the sudden death of poor Mrs. Erme. I instantly, by letter, appealed to Gwendolen for particulars, and she wrote me that her mother had yielded to long-threatened failure of the heart. She didn't say, but I took the liberty of reading into her words, that from the point of view of her marriage and also of her eagerness, which was quite a match for mine, this was a solution more prompt than could have been expected and more radical than waiting for the old lady to swallow the dose. I candidly admit indeed that at the time—for I heard from her repeatedly—I read some singular things into Gwendolen's words and some still more extraordinary ones into her silences. Pen in hand, this way, I live the time over, and it brings back the oddest sense of my having been, both for months and in spite of myself, a kind of coerced spectator. All my life had taken refuge in my eyes, which the procession of events appeared to have committed itself to keep astare. There were days when I thought of writing to Hugh Vereker and simply throwing myself on his charity. But I felt more deeply that I hadn't fallen quite so low—besides which, quite properly, he would send me about my business. Mrs. Erme's death brought Corvick straight home, and within the month he was united "very quietly"—as quietly, I seemed to make out, as he meant in his article to bring out his *trouvaille*—to the young lady he had loved and quitted. I use this last

term, I may parenthetically say, because I subsequently grew sure that at the time he went to India, at the time of his great news from Bombay, there had been no positive pledge between them whatever. There had been none at the moment she was affirming to me the very opposite. On the other hand he had certainly become engaged the day he returned. The happy pair went down to Torquay for their honeymoon, and there, in a reckless hour, it occurred to poor Corvick to take his young bride a drive. He had no command of that business : this had been brought home to me of old in a little tour we had once made together in a dogcart. In a dogcart he perched his companion for a rattle over Devonshire hills, on one of the likeliest of which he brought his horse, who, it was true, had bolted, down with such violence that the occupants of the cart were hurled forward and that he fell horribly on his head. He was killed on the spot ; Gwendolen escaped unhurt.

I pass rapidly over the question of this unmitigated tragedy, of what the loss of my best friend meant for me, and I complete my little history of my patience and my pain by the frank statement of my having, in a postscript to my very first letter to her after the receipt of the hideous news, asked Mrs. Corvick whether her husband mightn't at least have finished the great article on Vereker. Her answer was as prompt as my question : the article, which had been barely begun, was a mere heart-breaking scrap. She explained that our friend, abroad, had just settled down to it when interrupted by her mother's death, and that then, on his return, he had been kept from work by the engrossments into which that calamity was to plunge them. The opening pages were all that existed : they were striking, they were promising, but they didn't unveil the idol. That great intellectual feat was obviously to have formed his climax. She said nothing more, nothing to enlighten me as to the state of her own knowledge—the knowledge for the acquisition of which I had fancied her prodigiously acting. This was above all what I wanted to know : had *she* seen the idol unveiled ? Had there been a private ceremony for a palpitating audience of one ? For what else but that ceremony had the nuptials taken place ? I didn't like as yet to press her, though when I thought of what had passed between us on the subject in Corvick's absence her reticence surprised me. It was therefore not till much later, from Meran, that I risked another appeal, risked it in some trepidation, for she continued to tell me nothing. "Did you hear in those few days of your blighted bliss," I wrote, "what we desired so to hear ?" I said, "we," as a little hint ; and she showed me she could take a little

hint. "I heard everything," she replied, "and I mean to keep it to myself!"

9

It was impossible not to be moved with the strongest sympathy for her, and on my return to England I showed her every kindness in my power. Her mother's death had made her means sufficient, and she had gone to live in a more convenient quarter. But her loss had been great and her visitation cruel; it never would have occurred to me moreover to suppose she could come to feel the possession of a technical tip, of a piece of literary experience, a counterpoise to her grief. Strange to say, none the less, I couldn't help believing after I had seen her a few times that I caught a glimpse of some such oddity. I hasten to add that there had been other things I couldn't help believing, or at least imagining; and as I never felt I was really clear about these, so, as to the point I here touch on, I give her memory the benefit of the doubt. Stricken and solitary, highly accomplished and now, in her deep mourning, her maturer grace and her uncomplaining sorrow, incontestably handsome, she presented herself as leading a life of singular dignity and beauty. I had at first found a way to persuade myself that I should soon get the better of the reserve formulated, the week after the catastrophe, in her reply to an appeal as to which I was not unconscious that it might strike her as mistimed. Certainly that reserve was something of a shock to me—certainly it puzzled me the more I thought of it and even though I tried to explain it (with moments of success) by an imputation of exalted sentiments, of superstitious scruples, of a refinement of loyalty. Certainly it added at the same time hugely to the price of Vereker's secret, precious as this mystery already appeared. I may as well confess abjectly that Mrs. Corvick's unexpected attitude was the final tap on the nail that was to fix fast my luckless idea, convert it into the obsession of which I'm for ever conscious.

But this only helped me the more to be artful, to be adroit, to allow time to elapse before renewing my suit. There were plenty of speculations for the interval, and one of them was deeply absorbing. Corvick had kept his information from his young friend till after the removal of the last barrier to their intimacy—then only had he let the cat out of the bag. Was it Gwendolen's idea, taking a hint from him, to liberate this animal only on the basis of the renewal of such a relation? Was the figure in the carpet traceable or describable only for husbands

and wives—for lovers supremely united? It came back to me in a mystifying manner that in Kensington Square, when I mentioned that Corvick would have told the girl he loved, some word had dropped from Vereker that gave colour to this possibility. There might be little in it, but there was enough to make me wonder if I should have to marry Mrs. Corvick to get what I wanted. Was I prepared to offer her this price for the blessing of her knowledge? Ah that way madness lay!—so I at least said to myself in bewildered hours. I could see meanwhile the torch she refused to pass on flame away in her chamber of memory—pour through her eyes a light that shone in her lonely house. At the end of six months I was fully sure of what this warm presence made up to her for. We had talked again and again of the man who had brought us together—of his talent, his character, his personal charm, his certain career, his dreadful doom, and even of his clear purpose in that great study which was to have been a supreme literary portrait, a kind of critical Vandyke or Velazquez. She had conveyed to me in abundance that she was tongue-tied by her perversity, by her piety, that she would never break the silence it had not been given to the “right person,” as she said, to break. The hour however finally arrived. One evening when I had been sitting with her longer than usual I laid my hand firmly on her arm. “Now at last what is it?”

She had been expecting me and was ready. She gave a long slow soundless headshake, merciful only in being inarticulate. This mercy didn’t prevent its hurling at me the largest finest coldest “Never!” I had yet, in the course of a life that had known denials, had to take full in the face. I took it and was aware that with the hard blow the tears had come into my eyes. So for a while we sat and looked at each other; after which I slowly rose. I was wondering if some day she would accept me; but this was not what I brought out. I said as I smoothed down my hat: “I know what to think then. It’s nothing!”

A remote disdainful pity for me gathered in her dim smile; then she spoke in a voice that I hear at this hour: “It’s my *life*!” As I stood at the door she added: “You’ve insulted him!”

“Do you mean Vereker?”

“I mean the Dead!”

I recognised when I reached the street the justice of her charge. Yes, it was her life—I recognised that too; but her life none the less made room with the lapse of time for another interest. A year and a half after Corvick’s death she published in a single

volume her second novel, "Overmastered," which I pounced on in the hope of finding in it some tell-tale echo or some peeping face. All I found was a much better book than her younger performance, showing I thought the better company she had kept. As a tissue tolerably intricate it was a carpet with a figure of its own ; but the figure was not the figure I was looking for. On sending a review of it to *The Middle* I was surprised to learn from the office that a notice was already in type. When the paper came out I had no hesitation in attributing this article, which I thought rather vulgarly overdone, to Drayton Deane, who in the old days had been something of a friend of Corvick's, yet had only within a few weeks made the acquaintance of his widow. I had had an early copy of the book, but Deane had evidently had an earlier. He lacked all the same the light hand with which Corvick had gilded the gingerbread—he laid on the tinsel in splotches.

10

Six months later appeared "The Right of Way," the last chance, though we didn't know it, that we were to have to redeem ourselves. Written wholly during Vereker's sojourn abroad, the book had been heralded, in a hundred paragraphs, by the usual ineptitudes. I carried it, as early a copy as any, I this time flattered myself, straightway to Mrs. Corvick. This was the only use I had for it ; I left the inevitable tribute of *The Middle* to some more ingenious mind and some less irritated temper. "But I already have it," Gwendolen said. "Drayton Deane was so good as to bring it to me yesterday, and I've just finished it."

"Yesterday ? How did he get it so soon ?"

"He gets everything so soon ! He's to review it in *The Middle*."

"He—Drayton Deane—review Vereker ?" I couldn't believe my ears.

"Why not ? One fine ignorance is as good as another."

I winced but I presently said : "You ought to review him yourself !"

"I don't 'review,' " she laughed, "I'm reviewed !"

Just then the door was thrown open. "Ah yes, here's your reviewer !" Drayton Deane was there with his long legs and his tall forehead : he had come to see what she thought of "The Right of Way," and to bring news that was singularly relevant.

The evening papers were just out with a telegram on the author of that work, who, in Rome, had been ill for some days with an attack of malarial fever. It had at first not been thought grave, but had taken, in consequence of complications, a turn that might give rise to anxiety. Anxiety had indeed at the latest hour begun to be felt.

I was struck in the presence of these tidings with the fundamental detachment that Mrs. Corvick's overt concern quite failed to hide : it gave me the measure of her consummate independence. That independence rested on her knowledge, the knowledge which nothing now could destroy and which nothing could make different. The figure in the carpet might take on another twist or two, but the sentence had virtually been written. The writer might go down to his grave : she was the person in the world to whom—as if she had been his favoured heir—his continued existence was least of a need. This reminded me how I had observed at a particular moment—after Corvick's death—the drop of her desire to see him face to face. She had got what she wanted without that. I had been sure that if she hadn't got it she wouldn't have been restrained from the endeavour to sound him personally by those superior reflections, more conceivable on a man's part than on a woman's, which in my case had served as a deterrent. It wasn't however, I hasten to add, that my case, in spite of this invidious comparison, wasn't ambiguous enough. At the thought that Vereker was perhaps at that moment dying there rolled over me a wave of anguish—a poignant sense of how inconsistently I still depended on him. A delicacy that it was my one compensation to suffer to rule me had left the Alps and the Apennines between us, but the sense of the waning occasion suggested that I might in my despair at last have gone to him. Of course I should really have done nothing of the sort. I remained five minutes, while my companions talked of the new book, and when Drayton Deane appealed to me for my opinion of it I made answer, getting up, that I detested Hugh Vereker and simply couldn't read him. I departed with the moral certainty that as the door closed behind me Deane would brand me for awfully superficial. His hostess wouldn't contradict *that* at least.

I continue to trace with a briefer touch our intensely odd successions. Three weeks after this came Vereker's death, and before the year was out the death of his wife. That poor lady I had never seen, but I had had a futile theory that, should she survive him long enough to be decorously accessible, I might approach her with the feeble flicker of my plea. Did she know

and if she knew would she speak? It was much to be presumed that for more reasons than one she would have nothing to say; but when she passed out of all reach I felt renouncement indeed my appointed lot. I was shut up in my obsession for ever—my gaolers had gone off with the key. I find myself quite as vague as a captive in a dungeon about the time that further elapsed before Mrs. Corvick became the wife of Drayton Deane. I had foreseen, through my bars, this end of the business, though there was no indecent haste and our friendship had fallen rather off. They were both so "awfully intellectual" that it struck people as a suitable match, but I had measured better than any one the wealth of understanding the bride would contribute to the union. Never, for a marriage in literary circles—so the newspapers described the alliance—had a lady been so bravely dowered. I began with due promptness to look for the fruit of the affair—that fruit, I mean, of which the premonitory symptoms would be peculiarly visible in the husband. Taking for granted the splendour of the other party's nuptial gift, I expected to see him make a show commensurate with his increase of means. I knew what his means had been—his article on "The Right of Way" had distinctly given one the figure. As he was now exactly in the position in which still more exactly I was not I watched from month to month, in the likely periodicals, for the heavy message poor Corvick had been unable to deliver and the responsibility of which would have fallen on his successor. The widow and wife would have broken by the rekindled hearth the silence that only a widow and wife might break, and Deane would be as aflame with the knowledge as Corvick in his own hour, as Gwendolen in hers, had been. Well, he was aflame doubtless, but the fire was apparently not to become a public blaze. I scanned the periodicals in vain: Drayton Deane filled them with exuberant pages, but he withheld the page I most feverishly sought. He wrote on a thousand subjects, but never on the subject of Vereker. His special line was to tell truths that other people either "funked," as he said, or overlooked, but he never told the only truth that seemed to me in these days to signify. I met the couple in those literary circles referred to in the papers: I have sufficiently intimated that it was only in such circles we were all constructed to revolve. Gwendolen was more than ever committed to them by the publication of her third novel, and I myself definitely classed by holding the opinion that this work was inferior to its immediate predecessor. Was it worse because she had been keeping worse company? If her secret was, as she had told me, her life—a fact discernible in her increasing bloom,

an air of conscious privilege that, cleverly corrected by pretty charities, gave distinction to her appearance—it had yet not a direct influence on her work. That only made one—everything only made one—yearn the more for it ; only rounded it off with a mystery finer and subtler.

II

It was therefore from her husband I could never remove my eyes : I beset him in a manner that might have made him uneasy. I went even so far as to engage him in conversation. *Didn't* he know, hadn't he come into it as a matter of course ?—that question hummed in my brain. Of course he knew ; otherwise he wouldn't return my stare so queerly. His wife had told him what I wanted and he was amiably amused at my impotence. He didn't laugh—he wasn't a laugher : his system was to present to my irritation, so that I should crudely expose myself, a conversational blank as vast as his big bare brow. It always happened that I turned away with a settled conviction from these unpeopled expanses, which seemed to complete each other geographically and to symbolise together Drayton Deane's want of voice, want of form. He simply hadn't the art to use what he knew ; he literally was incompetent to take up the duty where Corvick had left it. I went still further—it was the only glimpse of happiness I had. I made up my mind that the duty didn't appeal to him. He wasn't interested, he didn't care. Yes, it quite comforted me to believe him too stupid to have joy of the thing I lacked. He was as stupid after as he had been before, and that deepened for me the golden glory in which the mystery was wrapped. I had of course none the less to recollect that his wife might have imposed her conditions and exactions. I had above all to remind myself that with Vereker's death the major incentive dropped. He was still there to be honoured by what might be done—he was no longer there to give it his sanction. Who alas but he had the authority ?

Two children were born to the pair, but the second cost the mother her life. After this stroke I seemed to see another ghost of a chance. I jumped at it in thought, but I waited a certain time for manners, and at last my opportunity arrived in a remunerative way. His wife had been dead a year when I met Drayton Deane in the smoking-room of a small club of which we both were members, but where for months—perhaps because I rarely entered it—I hadn't seen him. The room was empty

and the occasion propitious. I deliberately offered him, to have done with the matter for ever, that advantage for which I felt he had long been looking.

"As an older acquaintance of your late wife's than even you were," I began, "you must let me say to you something I have on my mind. I shall be glad to make any terms with you that you see fit to name for the information she must have had from George Corvick—the information you know, that had come to *him*, poor chap, in one of the happiest hours of his life, straight from Hugh Vereker."

He looked at me like a dim phrenological bust. "The information——?"

"Vereker's secret, my dear man—the general intention of his books : the string the pearls were strung on, the buried treasure, the figure in the carpet."

He began to flush—the numbers on his bumps to come out. "Vereker's books had a general intention?"

I stared in my turn. "You don't mean to say you don't know it?" I thought for a moment he was playing with me. "Mrs. Deane knew it ; she had it, as I say, straight from Corvick, who had, after infinite search and to Vereker's own delight, found the very mouth of the cave. Where is the mouth? He told after their marriage—and told alone—the person who, when the circumstances were reproduced, must have told *you*. Have I been wrong in taking for granted that she admitted you, as one of the highest privileges of the relation in which you stood to her, to the knowledge of which she was after Corvick's death the sole depository? All I know is that that knowledge is infinitely precious, and what I want you to understand is that if you'll in your turn admit me to it you'll do me a kindness for which I shall be lastingly grateful."

He had turned at last very red ; I dare say he had begun by thinking I had lost my wits. Little by little he followed me ; on my own side I stared with a livelier surprise. Then he spoke. "I don't know what you're talking about."

He wasn't acting—it was the absurd truth. "She *didn't* tell you——?"

"Nothing about Hugh Vereker."

I was stupefied ; the room went round. It had been too good even for that ! "Upon your honour?"

"Upon my honour. What the devil's the matter with you?" he growled.

"I'm astounded—I'm disappointed. I wanted to get it out of you."

"It isn't *in* me!" he awkwardly laughed. "And even if it were——"

"If it were you'd let me have it—oh yes, in common humanity. But I believe you. I see—I see!" I went on, conscious, with the full turn of the wheel, of my great delusion, my false view of the poor man's attitude. What I saw, though I couldn't say it, was that his wife hadn't thought him worth enlightening. This struck me as strange for a woman who had thought him worth marrying. At least I explained it by the reflexion that she couldn't possibly have married him for his understanding. She had married him for something else.

He was to some extent enlightened now, but he was even more astonished, more disconcerted: he took a moment to compare my story with his quickened memories. The result of his meditation was his presently saying with a good deal of rather feeble form: "This is the first I hear of what you allude to. I think you must be mistaken as to Mrs. Drayton Deane's having had any unmentioned, and still less any unmentionable, knowledge of Hugh Vereker. She'd certainly have wished it—should it have borne on his literary character—to be used."

"It *was* used. She used it herself. She told me with her own lips that she 'lived' on it."

I had no sooner spoken than I repented of my words; he grew so pale that I felt as if I had struck him. "Ah, 'lived'—!" he murmured, turning short away from me.

My compunction was real; I laid my hand on his shoulder. "I beg you to forgive me—I've made a mistake. You *don't* know what I thought you knew. You could, if I had been right, have rendered me a service; and I had my reasons for assuming that you'd be in a position to meet me."

"Your reasons?" he asked. "What were your reasons?"

I looked at him well; I hesitated; I considered. "Come and sit down with me here, and I'll tell you." I drew him to a sofa, I lighted another cigar and, beginning with the anecdote of Vereker's one descent from the clouds, I recited to him the extraordinary chain of accidents that had, in spite of the original gleam, kept me till that hour in the dark. I told him in a word just what I've written out here. He listened with deepening attention, and I became aware, to my surprise, by his ejaculations, by his questions, that he would have been after all not unworthy to be trusted by his wife. So abrupt an experience of her want of trust had now a disturbing effect on him; but I saw the immediate shock throb away little by little and then gather again into waves of wonder and curiosity—waves that promised, I could perfectly

THE FIGURE IN THE CARPET

judge, to break in the end with the fury of my own highest tides. I may say that to-day as victims of unappeased desire there isn't a pin to choose between us. The poor man's state is almost my consolation ; there are really moments when I feel it to be quite my revenge.

1896

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

THE story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless, but except the obvious remark that it was gruesome, as on Christmas Eve in an old house a strange tale should essentially be,¹ I remember no comment uttered till somebody happened to note it as the only case he had met in which such a visitation had fallen on a child. The case, I may mention, was that of an apparition in just such an old house as had gathered us for the occasion—an appearance, of a dreadful kind, to a little boy sleeping in the room with his mother and waking her up in the terror of it ; waking her not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also herself, before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that had shocked him. It was this observation that drew from Douglas—not immediately, but later in the evening—a reply that had the interesting consequence to which I call attention. Someone else told a story not particularly effective, which I saw he was not following. This I took for a sign that he had himself something to produce and that we should only have to wait. We waited in fact till two nights later ; but that same evening, before we scattered, he brought out what was in his mind.

“ I quite agree—in regard to Griffin’s ghost, or whatever it was—that its appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch. But it’s not the first occurrence of its charming kind that I know to have been concerned with a child. If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to *two* children—— ? ”

“ We say, of course,” somebody exclaimed, “ that two children give two turns ! Also that we want to hear about them.”

I can see Douglas there before the fire, to which he had got up to present his back, looking down at this converser with his hands in his pockets. “ Nobody but me, till now, has ever heard. It’s quite too horrible.” This was naturally declared by several voices to give the thing the utmost price, and our friend, with quiet art, prepared his triumph by turning his eyes over the rest of us and going on : “ It’s beyond everything. Nothing at all that I know touches it.”

“ For sheer terror ? ” I remember asking.

He seemed to say it wasn’t so simple as that ; to be really at a loss how to qualify it. He passed his hand over his eyes, made a little wincing grimace. “ For dreadful—dreadfulness ! ”

"Oh, how delicious!" cried one of the women.

He took no notice of her; he looked at me, but as if, instead of me, he saw what he spoke of. "For general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain."

"Well, then," I said, "just sit right down and begin."

He turned round to the fire, gave a kick to a log, watched it an instant. Then as he faced us again: "I can't begin. I shall have to send to town." There was a unanimous groan at this, and much reproach; after which, in his preoccupied way, he explained. "The story's written. It's in a locked drawer—it has not been out for years. I could write to my man and enclose the key; he could send down the packet as he finds it." It was to me in particular that he appeared to propound this—appeared almost to appeal for aid not to hesitate. He had broken a thickness of ice, the formation of many a winter; had had his reasons for a long silence. The others resented postponement, but it was just his scruples that charmed me. I adjured him to write by the first post and to agree with us for an early hearing; then I asked him if the experience in question had been his own. To this his answer was prompt. "Oh, thank God, no!"

"And is the record yours? You took the thing down?"

"Nothing but the impression. I took that *here*"—he tapped his heart. "I've never lost it."

"Then your manuscript——?"

"Is in old faded ink and in the most beautiful hand." He hung fire again. "A woman's. She has been dead these twenty years. She sent me the pages in question before she died." They were all listening now, and of course there was somebody to be arch, or at any rate to draw the inference. But if he put the inference by without a smile it was also without irritation. "She was a most charming person, but she was ten years older than I. She was my sister's governess," he quietly said. "She was the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position; she would have been worthy of any whatever. It was long ago, and this episode was long before. I was at Trinity, and I found her at home on my coming down the second summer. I was much there that year—it was a beautiful one; and we had, in her off-hours, some strolls and talks in the garden—talks in which she struck me as awfully clever and nice. Oh, yes; don't grin: I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she liked me too. If she hadn't she wouldn't have told me. She had never told any one. It wasn't simply that she said so, but that I knew she hadn't. I was sure; I could see. You'll easily judge why when you hear."

"Because the thing had been such a scare?"

He continued to fix me. "You'll easily judge," he repeated ; "*you will.*"

I fixed him too. "I see. She was in love."

He laughed for the first time. "You *are* acute. Yes, she was in love. That is, she *had* been. That came out—she couldn't tell her story without its coming out. I saw it, and she saw I saw it ; but neither of us spoke of it. I remember the time and the place—the corner of the lawn, the shade of the great beeches and the long hot summer afternoon. It wasn't a scene for a shudder ; but oh—!" He quitted the fire and dropped back into his chair.

"You'll receive the packet Thursday morning?" I said.

"Probably not till the second post."

"Well then ; after dinner—"

"You'll all meet me here?" He looked us round again.

"Isn't anybody going?" It was almost the tone of hope.

"Everybody will stay!"

"I will—and I will!" cried the ladies whose departure had been fixed. Mrs. Griffin, however, expressed the need for a little more light. "Who was it she was in love with?"

"The story will tell," I took upon myself to reply.

"Oh, I can't wait for the story!"

"The story *won't* tell," said Douglas ; "not in any literal, vulgar way."

"More's the pity then. That's the only way I ever understand."

"Won't *you* tell, Douglas?" somebody else inquired.

He sprang to his feet again. "Yes—to-morrow. Now I must go to bed. Good night." And, quickly catching up a candlestick, he left us, slightly bewildered. From our end of the great brown hall we heard his step on the stair ; whereupon Mrs. Griffin spoke. "Well, if I don't know who she was in love with I know who *he* was."

"She was ten years older," said her husband.

"*Raison de plus*—at that age! But it's rather nice, his long reticence."

"Forty years!" Griffin put in.

"With this outbreak at last."

"The outbreak," I returned, "will make a tremendous occasion of Thursday night"; and every one so agreed with me that in the light of it we lost all attention for everything else. The last story, however incomplete and like the mere opening of a serial, had been told ; we handshook and "candlestuck," as somebody said, and went to bed.

I knew the next day that a letter containing the key had, by the first post, gone off to his London apartments ; but in spite

of—or perhaps just on account of—the eventual diffusion of this knowledge we quite let him alone till after dinner, till such an hour of the evening in fact as might best accord with the kind of emotion on which our hopes were fixed. Then he became as communicative as we could desire, and indeed gave us his best reason for being so. We had it from him again before the fire in the hall, as we had our mild wonders of the previous night. It appeared that the narrative he had promised to read us really required for a proper intelligence a few words of prologue. Let me say here distinctly, to have done with it, that this narrative, from an exact transcript of my own made much later, is what I shall presently give. Poor Douglas, before his death—when it was in sight—committed to me the manuscript that reached him on the third of these days and that, on the same spot, with immense effect, he began to read to our hushed little circle on the night of the fourth. The departing ladies who had said they would stay didn't, of course, thank heaven, stay : they departed, in consequence of arrangements made, in a rage of curiosity, as they professed, produced by the touches with which he had already worked us up. But that only made his little final auditory more compact and select, kept it round the hearth subject to a common thrill.

The first of these touches conveyed that the written statement took up the date at a point after it had, in a manner, begun. The fact to be in possession of was therefore that his old friend, the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson, had at the age of twenty, on taking service for the first time in the schoolroom, come up to London, in trepidation, to answer in person an advertisement that had already placed her in brief correspondence with the advertiser. This person proved, on her presenting herself for judgement at a house in Harley Street that impressed her as vast and imposing—this prospective patron proved a gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life, such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel, before a fluttered, anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage. One could easily fix his type ; it never, happily, dies out. He was handsome and bold and pleasant, off-hand and gay and kind. He struck her, inevitably, as gallant and splendid, but what took her most of all and gave her the courage she afterwards showed was that he put the whole thing to her as a favour, an obligation he should gratefully incur. She figured him as rich, but as fearfully extravagant—saw him all in a glow of high fashion, of good looks, of expensive habits, of charming ways with women. He had for his town residence a big house filled with the spoils of travel and

the trophies of the chase ; but it was to his country home, an old family place in Essex, that he wished her immediately to proceed.

He had been left, by the death of their parents in India, guardian to a small nephew and a small niece, children of a younger, a military brother whom he had lost two years before. These children were, by the strangest of chances for a man in his position—a lone man without the right sort of experience or a grain of patience—very heavy on his hands. It had all been a great worry and, on his own part doubtless, a series of blunders, but he immensely pitied the poor chicks and had done all he could ; had in particular sent them down to his other house, the proper place for them being of course the country, and kept them there from the first with the best people he could find to look after them, parting even with his own servants to wait on them and going down himself, whenever he might, to see how they were doing. The awkward thing was that they had practically no other relations and that his own affairs took up all his time. He had put them in possession of Bly, which was healthy and secure, and had placed at the head of their little establishment—but belowstairs only—an excellent woman, Mrs. Grose, whom he was sure his visitor would like and who had formerly been maid to his mother. She was now housekeeper and was also acting for the time as superintendent to the little girl, of whom, without children of her own, she was by good luck extremely fond. There were plenty of people to help, but of course the young lady who should go down as governess would be in supreme authority. She would also have, in holidays, to look after the small boy, who had been for a term at school—young as he was to be sent, but what else could be done?—and who, as the holidays were about to begin, would be back from one day to the other. There had been for the two children at first a young lady whom they had had the misfortune to lose. She had done for them quite beautifully—she was a most respectable person—till her death, the great awkwardness of which had, precisely, left no alternative but the school for little Miles. Mrs. Grose, since then, in the way of manners and things, had done as she could for Flora ; and there were further, a cook, a housemaid, a dairy-woman, an old pony, an old groom and an old gardener, all likewise thoroughly respectable.

So far had Douglas presented his picture when someone put a question. "And what did the former governess die of? Of so much respectability?"

Our friend's answer was prompt. "That will come out. I don't anticipate."

"Pardon me—I thought that was just what you *are* doing."

"In her successor's place," I suggested, "I should have wished to learn if the office brought with it—"

"Necessary danger to life?" Douglas completed my thought. "She did wish to learn, and she did learn. You shall hear to-morrow what she learnt. Meanwhile of course the prospect struck her as slightly grim. She was young, untried, nervous: it was a vision of serious duties and little company, of really great loneliness. She hesitated—took a couple of days to consult and consider. But the salary offered much exceeded her modest measure, and on a second interview she faced the music, she engaged." And Douglas, with this, made a pause that, for the benefit of the company, moved me to throw in:

"The moral of which was of course the seduction by the splendid young man. She succumbed to it."

He got up and, as he had done the night before, went to the fire, gave a stir to a log with his foot, then stood a moment with his back to us. "She saw him only twice."

"Yes, but that's just the beauty of her passion."

A little to my surprise, on this, Douglas turned round to me. "It *was* the beauty of it. There were others," he went on, "who hadn't succumbed. He told her frankly all his difficulty—that for several applicants the conditions had been prohibitive. They were somehow simply afraid. It sounded dull—it sounded strange; and all the more so because of his main condition."

"Which was——?"

"That she should never trouble him—but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything; only meet all questions herself, receive all moneys from his solicitor, take the whole thing over and let him alone. She promised to do this, and she mentioned to me that when, for a moment, disburdened, delighted, he held her hand, thanking her for the sacrifice, she already felt rewarded."

"But was that all her reward?" one of the ladies asked.

"She never saw him again."

"Oh!" said the lady; which, as our friend immediately again left us, was the only other word of importance contributed to the subject till, the next night, by the corner of the hearth, in the best chair, he opened the faded red cover of a thin, old-fashioned, gilt-edged album. The whole thing took indeed more nights than one, but on the first occasion the same lady put another question. "What's your title?"

"I haven't one."

"Oh, I have!" I said. But Douglas, without heeding me, had

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

begun to read with a fine clearness that was like a rendering to the ear of the beauty of his author's hand.

I

I REMEMBER the whole beginning as a succession of flights and drops, a little see-saw of the right throbs and the wrong. After rising, in town, to meet his appeal I had at all events a couple of very bad days—found all my doubts bristle again, felt indeed sure I had made a mistake. In this state of mind I spent the long hours of bumping swinging coach that carried me to the stopping-place at which I was to be met by a vehicle from the house. This convenience, I was told, had been ordered, and I found, toward the close of the June afternoon, a commodious fly in waiting for me. Driving at that hour, on a lovely day, through a country the summer sweetness of which served as a friendly welcome, my fortitude revived and, as we turned into the avenue, took a flight that was probably but a proof of the point to which it had sunk. I suppose I had expected, or had dreaded, something so dreary that what greeted me was a good surprise. I remember as a thoroughly pleasant impression the broad, clear front, its open windows and fresh curtains and the pair of maids looking out ; I remember the lawn and the bright flowers and the crunch of my wheels on the gravel and the clustered tree-tops over which the rooks circled and cawed in the golden sky. The scene had a greatness that made it a different affair from my own scant home, and there immediately appeared at the door, with a little girl in her hand, a civil person who dropped me as decent a curtsy as if I had been the mistress or a distinguished visitor. I had received in Harley Street a narrower notion of the place, and that, as I recalled it, made me think the proprietor still more of a gentleman, suggested that what I was to enjoy might be a matter beyond his promise.

I had no drop again till the next day, for I was carried triumphantly through the following hours by my introduction to the younger of my pupils. The little girl who accompanied Mrs. Grose affected me on the spot as a creature too charming not to make it a great fortune to have to do with her. She was the most beautiful child I had ever seen, and I afterwards wondered why my employer hadn't made more of a point to me of this. I slept little that night—I was too much excited ; and this astonished me too, I recollect, remained with me, adding to my sense of the liberality with which I was treated. The large, impressive room,

one of the best in the house, the great state bed as I almost felt it, the figured full draperies, the long glasses in which, for the first time, I could see myself from head to foot, all struck me—like the wonderful appeal of my small charge—as so many things thrown in. It was thrown in as well, from the first moment, that I should get on with Mrs. Grose in a relation over which, on my way, in the coach, I fear I had rather brooded. The one appearance indeed that in this early outlook might have made me shrink again was that of her being so inordinately glad to see me. I felt within half an hour that she was so glad—stout, simple, plain, clean, wholesome woman—as to be positively on her guard against showing it too much. I wondered even then a little why she should wish *not* to show it, and that, with reflexion, with suspicion, might of course have made me uneasy.

But it was a comfort that there could be no uneasiness in a connection with anything so beatific as the radiant image of my little girl, the vision of whose angelic beauty had probably more than anything else to do with the restlessness that, before morning, made me several times rise and wander about my room to take in the whole picture and prospect ; to watch from my open window the faint summer dawn, to look at such stretches of the rest of the house as I could catch, and to listen, while in the fading dusk the first birds began to twitter, for the possible recurrence of a sound or two, less natural and not without but within, that I had fancied I heard. There had been a moment when I believed I recognised, faint and far, the cry of a child ; there had been another when I found myself just consciously starting as at the passage, before my door, of a light footstep. But these fancies were not marked enough not to be thrown off, and it is only in the light, or the gloom, I should rather say, of other and subsequent matters that they now come back to me. To watch, teach, “form” little Flora would too evidently be the making of a happy and useful life. It had been agreed between us downstairs that after this first occasion I should have her as a matter of course at night, her small white bed being already arranged, to that end, in my room. What I had undertaken was the whole care of her, and she had remained just this last time with Mrs. Grose only as an effect of our consideration for my inevitable strangeness and her natural timidity. In spite of this timidity—which the child herself, in the oddest way in the world, had been perfectly frank and brave about, allowing it, without a sign of uncomfortable consciousness, with the deep, sweet serenity indeed of one of Raphael’s holy infants, to be discussed, to be imputed to her and to determine us—I felt quite sure she would

presently like me. It was part of what I already liked Mrs. Grose herself for, the pleasure I could see her feel in my admiration and wonder as I sat at supper with four tall candles and with my pupil, in a high chair and a bib, brightly facing me between them over bread and milk. There were naturally things that in Flora's presence could pass between us only as prodigious and gratified looks, obscure and round-about allusions.

"And the little boy—does he look like her? Is he, too, so very remarkable?"

One wouldn't, it was already conveyed between us, too grossly flatter a child. "Oh, miss, *most* remarkable. If you think well of this one!"—and she stood there with a plate in her hand, beaming at our companion, who looked from one of us to the other with placid, heavenly eyes that contained nothing to check us.

"Yes; if I do—?"

"You *will* be carried away by the little gentleman!"

"Well, that, I think, is what I came for—to be carried away. I'm afraid, however," I remember feeling the impulse to add, "I'm rather easily carried away. I was carried away in London!"

I can still see Mrs. Grose's broad face as she took this in. "In Harley Street?"

"In Harley Street."

"Well, miss, you're not the first—and you won't be the last."

"Oh, I've no pretensions," I could laugh, "to being the only one. My other pupil, at any rate, as I understand, comes back to-morrow?"

"Not to-morrow—Friday, miss. He arrives, as you did, by the coach, under care of the guard, and is to be met by the same carriage."

I forthwith wanted to know if the proper as well as the pleasant and friendly thing wouldn't therefore be that on the arrival of the public conveyance I should await him with his little sister; a proposition to which Mrs. Grose assented so heartily that I somehow took her manner as a kind of comforting pledge—never falsified, thank heaven!—that we should on every question be quite at one. Oh, she was glad I was there!

What I felt the next day was, I suppose, nothing that could be fairly called a reaction from the cheer of my arrival; it was probably at the most only a slight oppression produced by a fuller measure of the scale, as I walked round them, gazed up at them, took them in, of my new circumstances. They had, as it were, an extent and mass for which I had not been prepared and in the presence of which I found myself, freshly, a little

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

scared not less than a little proud. Regular lessons, in this agitation, certainly suffered some wrong ; I reflected that my first duty was, by the gentlest arts I could contrive, to win the child into the sense of knowing me. I spent the day with her out of doors ; I arranged with her, to her great satisfaction, that it should be she, she only, who might show me the place. She showed it step by step and room by room and secret by secret, with droll, delightful, childish talk about it, and with the result, in half an hour, of our becoming tremendous friends. Young as she was I was struck, throughout our little tour, with her confidence and courage, with the way, in empty chambers and dull corridors, on crooked staircases that made me pause, and even on the summit of an old machicolated square tower that made me dizzy, her morning music, her disposition to tell me so many more things than she asked, rang out and led me on. I have not seen Bly since the day I left it, and I dare say that to my present older and more informed eyes it would show a very reduced importance. But as my little conductress, with her hair of gold and her frock of blue, danced before me round corners and pattered down passages, I had the view of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all colour out of story-books and fairy-tales. Wasn't it just a story-book over which I had fallen a-doze and a-dream ? No ; it was a big, ugly, antique but convenient house, embodying a few features of a building still older, half-displaced and half-utilized, in which I had the fancy of our being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship. Well, I was strangely at the helm !

2

THIS came home to me when, two days later, I drove over with Flora to meet, as Mrs. Grose said, the little gentleman ; and all the more for an incident that, presenting itself the second evening, had deeply disconcerted me. The first day had been, on the whole, as I have expressed, reassuring ; but I was to see it wind up to a change of note. The postbag that evening—it came late—contained a letter for me which, however, in the hand of my employer, I found to be composed but of a few words, enclosing another, addressed to himself, with a seal still unbroken. “ This, I recognise, is from the head master, and the head master's an awful bore. Read him, please ; deal with him ; but mind you don't report. Not a word. I'm off ! ” I broke the seal with a

great effort—so great a one that I was a long time coming to it ; took the unopened missive at last up to my room and only attacked it just before going to bed. I had better have let it wait till morning, for it gave me a second sleepless night. With no counsel to take, the next day, I was full of distress ; and it finally got so the better of me that I determined to open myself at least to Mrs. Grose.

“What does it mean ? The child’s dismissed his school.”

She gave me a look that I remarked at the moment ; then, visibly, with a quick blankness, seemed to try to take it back. “But aren’t they all—?”

“Sent home—yes. But only for the holidays. Miles may never go back at all.”

Consciously, under my attention, she reddened. “They won’t take him ?”

“They absolutely decline.”

At this she raised her eyes, which she had turned from me ; I saw them fill with good tears. “What has he done ?”

I cast about ; then I judged best simply to hand her my document—which, however, had the effect of making her, without taking it, simply put her hands behind her. She shook her head sadly. “Such things are not for me, miss.”

My counsellor couldn’t read ! I winced at my mistake, which I attenuated as I could, and opened the letter again to repeat it to her ; then, faltering in the act and folding it up once more, I put it back in my pocket. “Is it really *bad* ?”

The tears were still in her eyes. “Do the gentlemen say so ?”

“They go into no particulars. They simply express their regret that it should be impossible to keep him. That can have but one meaning.” Mrs. Grose listened with dumb emotion ; she forebore to ask me what this meaning might be ; so that, presently, to put the thing with some coherence and with the mere aid of her presence to my own mind, I went on : “That he’s an injury to the others.”

At this, with one of the quick turns of simple folk, she suddenly flamed up. “Master Miles !—*him* an injury ?”

There was such a flood of good faith in it that, though I had not yet seen the child, my very fears made me jump to the absurdity of the idea. I found myself, to meet my friend the better, offering it, on the spot, sarcastically. “To his poor little innocent mates !”

“It’s too dreadful,” cried Mrs. Grose, “to say such cruel things ! Why, he’s scarce ten years old.”

“Yes, yes ; it would be incredible.”

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

She was evidently grateful for such a profession. "See him, miss, first. *Then* believe it!" I felt forthwith a new impatience to see him; it was the beginning of a curiosity that, all the next hours, was to deepen almost to pain. Mrs. Grose was aware, I could judge, of what she had produced in me, and she followed it up with assurance. "You might as well believe it of the little lady. Bless her," she added the next moment—"look at her!"

I turned and saw that Flora, whom, ten minutes before, I had established in the schoolroom with a sheet of white paper, a pencil and a copy of nice "round O's," now presented herself to view at the open door. She expressed in her little way an extraordinary detachment from disagreeable duties, looking at me, however, with a great childish light that seemed to offer it as a mere result of the affection she had conceived for my person, which had rendered necessary that she should follow me. I needed nothing more than this to feel the full force of Mrs. Grose's comparison, and, catching my pupil in my arms, covered her with kisses in which there was a sob of atonement.

None the less, the rest of the day, I watched for further occasion to approach my colleague, especially as, toward evening, I began to fancy she rather sought to avoid me. I overtook her, I remember, on the staircase; we went down together and at the bottom I detained her, holding her there with a hand on her arm. "I take what you said to me at noon as a declaration that *you've* never known him to be bad."

She threw back her head; she had clearly by this time, and very honestly, adopted an attitude. "Oh, never known him—I don't pretend *that*!"

I was upset again. "Then you *have* known him—?"

"Yes indeed, miss, thank God!"

On reflection I accepted this. "You mean that a boy who never is—?"

"Is no boy for *me*!"

I held her tighter. "You like them with the spirit to be naughty?" Then, keeping pace with her answer, "So do I!" I eagerly brought out. "But not to the degree to contaminate—"

"To contaminate?"—my big word left her at a loss.

I explained it. "To corrupt."

She stared, taking my meaning in; but it produced in her an odd laugh. "Are you afraid he'll corrupt *you*?" She put the question with such a fine bold humour that with a laugh, a little silly doubtless, to match her own, I gave way for the time to the apprehension of ridicule.

But the next day, as the hour for my drive approached, I cropped up in another place. "What was the lady who was here before?"

"The last governess? She was also young and pretty—almost as young and almost as pretty, miss, even as you."

"Ah, then I hope her youth and her beauty helped her!" I recollect throwing off. "He seems to like us young and pretty!"

"Oh, he *did*," Mrs. Grose assented; "it was the way he liked every one!" She had no sooner spoken, indeed, than she caught herself up. "I mean that's *his* way—the master's."

I was struck. "But of whom did you speak first?"

She looked blank, but she coloured. "Why, of *him*."

"Of the master?"

"Of who else?"

There was so obviously no one else that the next moment I had lost my impression of her having accidentally said more than she meant; and I merely asked what I wanted to know. "Did *she* see anything in the boy—?"

"That wasn't right? She never told me."

I had a scruple, but I overcame it. "Was she careful—particular?"

Mrs. Grose appeared to try to be conscientious. "About some things—yes."

"But not about all?"

Again she considered. "Well, miss—she's gone. I won't tell tales."

"I quite understand your feeling," I hastened to reply; but I thought it after an instant not opposed to this concession to pursue: "Did she die here?"

"No—she went off."

I don't know what there was in this brevity of Mrs. Grose's that struck me as ambiguous. "Went off to die?" Mrs. Grose looked straight out of the window, but I felt that, hypothetically, I had a right to know what young persons engaged for Bly were expected to do. "She was taken ill, you mean, and went home?"

"She was not taken ill, so far as appeared, in this house. She left it, at the end of the year, to go home, as she said, for a short holiday, to which the time she had put in had certainly given her a right. We had then a young woman—a nursemaid who had stayed on and who was a good girl and clever; and *she* took the children altogether for the interval. But our young lady never came back, and at the very moment I was expecting her I heard from the master that she was dead."

I turned this over. "But of what?"

"He never told me! But please, miss," said Mrs. Grose, "I must get to my work."

3

HER thus turning her back on me was fortunately not, for my just preoccupations, a snub that could check the growth of our mutual esteem. We met, after I had brought home little Miles, more intimately than ever on the ground of my stupefaction, my general emotion : so monstrous was I then ready to pronounce it that such a child as had now been revealed to me should be under an interdict. I was a little late on the scene of his arrival, and I felt, as he stood wistfully looking out for me before the door of the inn at which the coach had put him down, that I had seen him on the instant, without and within, in the great glow of freshness, the same positive fragrance of purity, in which I had from the first moment seen his little sister. He was incredibly beautiful, and Mrs. Grose had put her finger on it : everything but a sort of passion of tenderness for him was swept away by his presence. What I then and there took him to my heart for was something divine that I have never found to the same degree in any child—his indescribable little air of knowing nothing in the world but love. It would have been impossible to carry a bad name with a greater sweetness of innocence, and by the time I had got back to Bly with him I remained merely bewildered—so far, that is, as I was not outraged—by the sense of the horrible letter locked up in one of the drawers in my room. As soon as I could compass a private word with Mrs. Grose I declared to her that it was grotesque.

She promptly understood me. "You mean the cruel charge—?"

"It doesn't live an instant. My dear woman, *look* at him!"

She smiled at my pretension to have discovered his charm. "I assure you, miss, I do nothing else! What will you say then?" she immediately added.

"In answer to the letter?" I had made up my mind. "Nothing at all."

"And to his uncle?"

I was incisive. "Nothing at all."

"And to the boy himself?"

I was wonderful. "Nothing at all."

She gave with her apron a great wipe to her mouth. "Then I'll stand by you. We'll see it out."

"We'll see it out!" I ardently echoed, giving her my hand to make it a vow.

She held me there a moment, then whisked up her apron again with her detached hand. "Would you mind, miss, if I used the freedom—"

"To kiss me? No!" I took the good creature in my arms and, after we had embraced like sisters, felt still more fortified and indignant.

This, at all events, was for the time: a time so full that as I recall the way it went it reminds me of all the art I now need to make it a little distinct. What I look back at with amazement is the situation I accepted. I had undertaken, with my companion, to see it out, and I was under a charm apparently that could smooth away the extent and the far and difficult connexions of such an effort. I was lifted aloft on a great wave of infatuation and pity. I found it simple, in my ignorance, my confusion and perhaps my conceit, to assume that I could deal with a boy whose education for the world was all on the point of beginning. I am unable even to remember at this day what proposal I framed for the end of his holidays and the resumption of his studies. Lessons with me indeed, that charming summer, we all had a theory that he was to have; but I now feel that for weeks the lessons must have been rather my own. I learnt something—at first certainly—that had not been one of the teachings of my small, smothered life; learnt to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow. It was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature. And then there was consideration—and consideration was sweet. Oh, it was a trap—not designed but deep—to my imagination, to my delicacy, perhaps to my vanity; to whatever in me was most excitable. The best way to picture it all is to say that I was off my guard. They gave me so little trouble—they were of a gentleness so extraordinary. I used to speculate—but even this with a dim disconnectedness—as to how the rough future (for all futures are rough!) would handle them and might bruise them. They had the bloom of health and happiness; and yet, as if I had been in charge of a pair of little grandees, of princes of the blood, for whom everything, to be right, would have to be fenced about and ordered and arranged, the only form that in my fancy the after-years could take for them was that of a romantic, a really royal extension of the garden and the park. It may be of course above all that what suddenly broke into this gives the previous time a charm of stillness—that hush in which something gathers

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

or crouches. The change was actually like the spring of a beast.

In the first weeks the days were long ; they often, at their finest, gave me what I used to call my own hour, the hour when, for my pupils, tea-time and bed-time having come and gone, I had before my final retirement a small interval alone. Much as I liked my companions this hour was the thing in the day I liked most ; and I liked it best of all when, as the light faded—or rather, I should say, the day lingered and the last calls of the last birds sounded, in a flushed sky, from the old trees—I could take a turn into the grounds and enjoy, almost with a sense of property that amused and flattered me, the beauty and dignity of the place. It was a pleasure at these moments to feel myself tranquil and justified ; doubtless perhaps also to reflect that by my discretion, my quiet good sense and general high propriety, I was giving pleasure—if he ever thought of it!—to the person to whose pressure I had yielded. What I was doing was what he had earnestly hoped and directly asked of me, and that I *could*, after all, do it proved even a greater joy than I had expected. I dare say I fancied myself, in short, a remarkable young woman and took comfort in the faith that this would more publicly appear. Well, I needed to be remarkable to offer a front to the remarkable things that presently gave their first sign.

It was plump, one afternoon, in the middle of my very hour : the children were tucked away and I had come out for my stroll: One of the thoughts that, as I don't in the least shrink now from noting, used to be with me in these wanderings was that it would be as charming as a charming story suddenly to meet someone. Someone would appear there at the turn of a path and would stand before me and smile and approve. I didn't ask more than that—I only asked that he should *know* ; and the only way to be sure he knew would be to see it, and the kind light of it, in his handsome face. That was exactly present to me—by which I mean the face was—when, on the first of these occasions, at the end of a long June day, I stopped short on emerging from one of the plantations and coming into view of the house. What arrested me on the spot—and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for—was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real. He did stand there!—but high up, beyond the lawn and at the very top of the tower to which, on that first morning, little Flora had conducted me. This tower was one of a pair—square, incongruous, crenellated structures—that were distinguished, for some reason, though I could see little difference, as the new and the old. They flanked opposite ends of the house and were probably architectural absurdities, redeemed in a

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

measure, indeed, by not being wholly disengaged nor of a height too pretentious, dating, in their ginger-bread antiquity, from a romantic revival that was already a respectable past. I admired them, had fancies about them, for we could all profit in a degree, especially when they loomed through the dusk, by the grandeur of their actual battlements ; yet it was not at such an elevation that the figure I had so often invoked seemed most in place.

It produced in me, this figure, in the clear twilight, I remember, two distinct gasps of emotion, which were, sharply, the shock of my first and that of my second surprise. My second was a violent perception of the mistake of my first : the man who met my eyes was not the person I had precipitately supposed. There came to me thus a bewilderment of vision of which, after these years, there is no living view that I can hope to give. An unknown man in a lonely place is a permitted object of fear to a young woman privately bred ; and the figure that faced me was—a few more seconds assured me—as little any one else I knew as it was the image that had been in my mind. I had not seen it in Harley Street—I had not seen it anywhere. The place, moreover, in the strangest way in the world, had on the instant and by the very fact of its appearance become a solitude. To me at least, making my statement here with a deliberation with which I have never made it, the whole feeling of the moment returns. It was as if, while I took in what I did take in, all the rest of the scene had been stricken with death. I can hear again, as I write, the intense hush in which the sounds of evening dropped. The rooks stopped cawing in the golden sky and the friendly hour lost for the unspeakable minute all its voice. But there was no other change in nature, unless indeed it were a change that I saw with a stranger sharpness. The gold was still in the sky, the clearness in the air, and the man who looked at me over the battlements was as definite as a picture in a frame. That's how I thought, with extraordinary quickness, of each person he might have been and that he wasn't. We were confronted across our distance quite long enough for me to ask myself with intensity who then he was and to feel, as an effect of my inability to say, a wonder that in a few seconds more became intense.

The great question, or one of these, is afterwards, I know, with regard to certain matters, the question of how long they have lasted. Well, this matter of mine, think what you will of it, lasted while I caught at a dozen possibilities, none of which made a difference for the better, that I could see, in there having been in the house—and for how long, above all ?—a person of whom I was in ignorance. It lasted while I just bridled a little with the

sense of how my office seemed to require that there should be no such ignorance and no such person. It lasted while this visitant, at all events—and there was a touch of the strange freedom, as I remember, in the sign of familiarity of his wearing no hat—seemed to fix me, from his position, with just the question, just the scrutiny through the fading light, that his own presence provoked. We were too far apart to call to each other, but there was a moment at which, at shorter range, some challenge between us, breaking the hush, would have been the right result of our straight mutual stare. He was in one of the angles, the one away from the house, very erect, as it struck me, and with both hands on the ledge. So I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page ; then, exactly, after a minute, as if to add to the spectacle, he slowly changed his place—passed, looking at me hard all the while, to the opposite corner of the platform. Yes, it was intense to me that during this transit he never took his eyes from me, and I can see at this moment the way his hand as he went, moved from one of the crenellations to the next. He stopped at the other corner, but less long, and even as he turned away still markedly fixed me. He turned away ; that was all I knew.

4

It was not that I didn't wait, on this occasion, for more, since I was as deeply rooted as shaken. Was there a "secret" at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement ? I can't say how long I turned it over, or how long, in a confusion of curiosity and dread, I remained where I had had my collision ; I only recall that when I re-entered the house darkness had quite closed in. Agitation, in the interval, certainly had held me and driven me, for I must, in circling about the place, have walked three miles ; but I was to be later on so much more overwhelmed that this mere dawn of alarm was a comparatively human chill. The most singular part of it, in fact—singular as the rest had been—was the part I became, in the hall, aware of in meeting Mrs. Grose. This picture comes back to me in the general train—the impression, as I received it on my return, of the wide white panelled space, bright in the lamplight and with its portraits and red carpets, and of the good surprised look of my friend, which immediately told me she had missed me. It came to me straightway, under her contact, that, with plain heartiness, mere relieved anxiety at my appearance, she knew nothing whatever that could bear upon the

incident I had there ready for her. I had not suspected in advance that her comfortable face would pull me up, and I somehow measured the importance of what I had seen by my thus finding myself hesitate to mention it. Scarce anything in the whole history seems to me so odd as this fact that my real beginning of fear was one, as I may say, with the instinct of sparing my companion. On the spot, accordingly, in the pleasant hall and with her eyes on me, I, for a reason that I couldn't then have phrased, achieved an inward revolution—offered a vague pretext for my lateness and, with the idea of the beauty of the night and of the heavy dew and wet feet, went as soon as possible to my room.

Here it was another affair ; here, for many days after, it was a queer affair enough. There were hours, from day to day—or at least there were moments, snatched even from clear duties—when I had to shut myself up to think. It wasn't so much yet that I was more nervous than I could bear to be as that I was remarkably afraid of becoming so ; for the truth I had now to turn over was simply and clearly the truth that I could arrive at no account whatever of the visitor with whom I had been so inexplicably and yet, as it seemed to me, so intimately concerned. It took me little time to see that I might easily sound, without forms of inquiry and without exciting remark, any domestic complication. The shock I had suffered must have sharpened all my senses ; I felt sure, at the end of three days and as the result of mere closer attention, that I had not been practised upon by the servants nor made the object of any "game." Of whatever it was that I knew nothing was known around me. There was but one sane inference : someone had taken a liberty rather monstrous. That was what, repeatedly, I dipped into my room and locked the door to say to myself. We had been, collectively, subject to an intrusion ; some unscrupulous traveller, curious in old houses, had made his way in unobserved, enjoyed the prospect from the best point of view and then stolen out as he came. If he had given me such a bold, hard stare, that was but a part of his indiscretion. The good thing, after all, was that we should surely see no more of him.

This was not so good a thing, I admit, as not to leave me to judge that what, essentially, made nothing else much signify was simply my charming work. My charming work was just my life with Miles and Flora, and through nothing could I so like it as through feeling that to throw myself into it was to throw myself out of my trouble. The attraction of my small charges was a constant joy, leading me to wonder afresh at the vanity of my original fears, the distaste I had begun by entertaining for the

probable grey prose of my office. There was to be no grey prose, it appeared, and no long grind ; so how could work not be charming that presented itself as daily beauty ? It was all the romance of the nursery and the poetry of the schoolroom. I don't mean by this, of course, that we studied only fiction and verse ; I mean that I can express no otherwise the sort of interest my companions inspired. How can I describe that except by saying that instead of growing deadly used to them—and it's a marvel for a governess : I call the sisterhood to witness !—I made constant fresh discoveries. There was one direction, assuredly, in which these discoveries stopped : deep obscurity continued to cover the region of the boy's conduct at school. It had been promptly given me, I have noted, to face that mystery without a pang. Perhaps even it would be nearer the truth to say that—without a word—he himself had cleared it up. He had made the whole charge absurd. My conclusion bloomed there with the real rose-flush of his innocence : he was only too fine and fair for the little horrid, unclean school-world, and he had paid a price for it. I reflected acutely that the sense of such individual differences, such superiorities of quality, always, on the part of the majority—which could include even stupid sordid head masters—turns infallibly to the vindictive.

Both the children had a gentleness—it was their only fault, and it never made Miles a muff—that kept them (how shall I express it ?) almost impersonal and certainly quite unpunishable. They were like those cherubs of the anecdote who had—morally, at any rate—nothing to whack ! I remember feeling with Miles in especial as if he had had, as it were, nothing to call even an infinitesimal history. We expect of a small child scant enough “ antecedents,” but there was in this beautiful little boy something extraordinarily sensitive, yet extraordinarily happy, that, more than in any creature of his age I have seen, struck me as beginning anew each day. He had never for a second suffered. I took this as a direct disproof of his having really been chastised. If he had been wicked he would have “ caught ” it, and I should have caught it by the rebound—I should have found the trace, should have felt the wound and the dishonour. I could reconstitute nothing at all, and he was therefore an angel. He never spoke of his school, never mentioned a comrade or a master ; and I, for my part, was quite too much disgusted to allude to them. Of course I was under the spell, and the wonderful part is that, even at the time, I perfectly knew I was. But I gave myself up to it ; it was an antidote to any pain, and I had more pains than one. I was in receipt in these days of disturbing letters from home,

where things were not going well. But with this joy of my children what things in the world mattered? That was the question I used to put to my scrappy retirements. I was dazzled by their loveliness.

There was a Sunday—to get on—when it rained with such force and for so many hours that there could be no procession to church; in consequence of which, as the day declined, I had arranged with Mrs. Grose that, should the evening show improvement, we would attend together the late service. The rain happily stopped, and I prepared for our walk, which, through the park and by the good road to the village, would be a matter of twenty minutes. Coming downstairs to meet my colleague in the hall, I remembered a pair of gloves that had required three stitches and that had received them—with a publicity perhaps not edifying—while I sat with the children at their tea, served on Sundays, by exception, in that cold clean temple of mahogany and brass, the “grown-up” dining-room. The gloves had been dropped there, and I turned in to recover them. The day was grey enough, but the afternoon light still lingered, and it enabled me, on crossing the threshold, not only to recognise, on a chair near the wide window, then closed, the articles I wanted, but to become aware of a person on the other side of the window and looking straight in. One step into the room had sufficed; my vision was instantaneous; it was all there. The person looking straight in was the person who had already appeared to me. He appeared thus again with I won’t say greater distinctness, for that was impossible, but with a nearness that represented a forward stride in our intercourse and made me, as I met him, catch my breath and turn cold. He was the same—he was the same, and seen, this time, as he had been seen before, from the waist up, the window, though the dining-room was on the ground-floor, not going down to the terrace on which he stood. His face was close to the glass, yet the effect of this better view was, strangely, just to show me how intense the former had been. He remained but a few seconds—long enough to convince me he also saw and recognised; but it was as if I had been looking at him for years and had known him always. Something, however, happened this time that had not happened before; his stare into my face, through the glass and across the room, was as deep and hard as then, but it quitted me for a moment during which I could still watch it, see it fix successively several other things. On the spot there came to me the added shock of a certitude that it was not for me he had come. He had come for some one else.

The flash of this knowledge—for it was knowledge in the midst

of dread—produced in me the most extraordinary effect, starting, as I stood there, a sudden vibration of duty and courage. I say courage because I was beyond all doubt already far gone. I bounded straight out of the door again, reached that of the house, got in an instant upon the drive and, passing along the terrace as fast as I could rush, turned a corner and came full in sight. But it was in sight of nothing now—my visitor had vanished. I stopped, almost dropped, with the real relief of this ; but I took in the whole scene—I gave him time to reappear. I call it time, but how long was it ? I can't speak to the purpose to-day of the duration of these things. That kind of measure must have left me : they couldn't have lasted as they actually appeared to me to last. The terrace and the whole place, the lawn and the garden behind it, all I could see of the park, were empty with a great emptiness. There were shrubberies and big trees, but I remember the clear assurance I felt that none of them concealed him. He was there or was not there : not there if I didn't see him. I got hold of this ; then, instinctively, instead of returning as I had come, went to the window. It was confusedly present to me that I ought to place myself where he had stood. I did so ; I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he had looked, into the room. As if, at this moment, to show me exactly what his range had been, Mrs. Grose, as I had done for himself just before, came in from the hall. With this I had the full image of a repetition of what had already occurred. She saw me as I had seen my own visitant ; she pulled up short as I had done ; I gave her something of the shock that I had received. She turned white, and this made me ask myself if I had blanched as much. She stared, in short, and retreated just on *my* lines, and I knew she had then passed out and come round to me and that I should presently meet her. I remained where I was, and while I waited I thought of more things than one. But there's only one I take space to mention. I wondered why *she* should be scared.

5

OH, she let me know as soon as, round the corner of the house, she loomed again into view. "What in the name of goodness is the matter—?" She was now flushed and out of breath.

I said nothing till she came quite near. "With me?" I must have made a wonderful face. "Do I show it?"

"You're as white as a sheet. You look awful."

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

I considered ; I could meet on this, without scruple, any degree of innocence. My need to respect the bloom of Mrs. Grose's had dropped, without a rustle, from my shoulders, and if I wavered for the instant it was not with what I kept back. I put out my hand to her and she took it ; I held her hard a little, liking to feel her close to me. There was a kind of support in the shy heave of her surprise. " You came for me for church, of course, but I can't go."

" Has anything happened ? "

" Yes. You must know now. Did I look very queer ? "

" Through this window ? Dreadful ! "

" Well," I said, " I've been frightened." Mrs. Grose's eyes expressed plainly that *she* had no wish to be, yet also that she knew too well her place not to be ready to share with me any marked inconvenience. Oh, it was quite settled that she *must* share ! " Just what you saw from the dining-room a minute ago was the effect of that. What *I* saw—just before—was much worse."

Her hand tightened. " What was it ? "

" An extraordinary man. Looking in."

" What extraordinary man ? "

" I haven't the least idea."

Mrs. Grose gazed round us in vain. " Then where is he gone ? "

" I know still less."

" Have you seen him before ? "

" Yes—once. On the old tower."

She could only look at me harder. " Do you mean he's a stranger ? "

" Oh, very much ! "

" Yet you didn't tell me ? "

" No—for reasons. But now that you've guessed—"

Mrs. Grose's round eyes encountered this charge. " Ah, I haven't guessed ! " she said very simply. " How can I if *you* don't imagine ? "

" I don't in the very least."

" You've seen him nowhere but on the tower ? "

" And on this spot just now."

Mrs. Grose looked round again. " What was he doing on the tower ? "

" Only standing there and looking down at me."

She thought a minute. " Was he a gentleman ? "

I found I had no need to think. " No." She gazed in deeper wonder. " No."

" Then nobody about the place ? Nobody from the village ? "

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

"Nobody—nobody. I didn't tell you, but I made sure."

She breathed a vague relief : this was, oddly, so much to the good. It only went indeed a little way. "But if he isn't a gentleman—"

"What is he? He's a horror."

"A horror?"

"He's—God help me if I know *what* he is!"

Mrs. Grose looked round once more ; she fixed her eyes on the duskiest distance and then, pulling herself together, turned to me with full inconsequence. "It's time we should be at church."

"Oh, I'm not fit for church!"

"Won't it do you good?"

"It won't do *them*—!" I nodded at the house.

"The children?"

"I can't leave them now."

"You're afraid—?"

I spoke boldly. "I'm afraid of *him*."

Mrs. Grose's large face showed me, at this, for the first time, the far-away faint glimmer of a consciousness more acute : I somehow made out in it the delayed dawn of an idea I myself had not given her and that was as yet quite obscure to me. It comes back to me that I thought instantly of this as something I could get from her ; and I felt it to be connected with the desire she presently showed to know more. "When was it—on the tower?"

"About the middle of the month. At this same hour."

"Almost at dark," said Mrs. Grose.

"Oh, no, not nearly. I saw him as I see you."

"Then how did he get in?"

"And how did he get out?" I laughed. "I had no opportunity to ask him! This evening, you see," I pursued, "he has not been able to get in."

"He only peeps?"

"I hope it will be confined to that!" She had now let go my hand ; she turned away a little. I waited an instant ; then I brought out : "Go to church. Good-bye. I must watch."

Slowly she faced me again. "Do you fear for them?"

We met in another long look. "Don't *you*?" Instead of answering she came nearer to the window and, for a minute, applied her face to the glass. "You see how he could see," I meanwhile went on.

She didn't move. "How long was he here?"

"Till I came out. I came to meet him."

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

Mrs. Grose at last turned round, and there was still more in her face. "I couldn't have come out."

"Neither could I!" I laughed again. "But I did come. I've my duty."

"So have I mine," she replied; after which she added: "What's he like?"

"I've been dying to tell you. But he's like nobody."

"Nobody?" she echoed.

"He has no hat." Then seeing in her face that she already, in this, with a deeper dismay, found a touch of picture, I quickly added stroke to stroke. "He has red hair, very red, close-curling, and a pale face, long in shape, with straight, good features and little, rather queer whiskers that are as red as his hair. His eyebrows are somehow darker; they look particularly arched and as if they might move a good deal. His eyes are sharp, strange—awfully; but I only know clearly that they're rather small and very fixed. His mouth's wide and his lips are thin, and except for his little whiskers he's quite clean-shaven. He gives me a sort of sense of looking like an actor."

"An actor!" It was impossible to resemble one less, at least, than Mrs. Grose at that moment.

"I've never seen one, but so I suppose them. He's tall, active, erect," I continued, "but never—no, never!—a gentleman."

My companion's face had blanched as I went on; her round eyes started and her mild mouth gaped. "A gentleman?" she gasped, confounded, stupefied: "a gentleman *he*?"

"You know him then?"

She visibly tried to hold herself. "But he is handsome?"

I saw the way to help her. "Remarkably!"

"And dressed—?"

"In somebody's clothes. They're smart, but they're not his own."

She broke into a breathless affirmative groan. "They're the master's!"

I caught it up. "You *do* know him?"

She faltered but a second. "Quint!" she cried.

"Quint?"

"Peter Quint—his own man, his valet, when he was here!"

"When the master was?"

Gaping still, but meeting me, she pieced it all together. "He never wore his hat, but he did wear—well, there were waistcoats missed! They were both here—last year. Then the master went, and Quint was alone."

I followed, but halting a little. "Alone?"

"Alone with us." Then as from a deeper depth, "In charge," she added.

"And what became of him?"

She hung fire so long that I was still more mystified. "He went too," she brought out at last.

"Went where?"

Her expression, at this, became extraordinary. "God knows where! He died."

"Died?" I almost shrieked.

She seemed fairly to square herself, plant herself more firmly to express the wonder of it. "Yes. Mr. Quint's dead."

6

It took of course more than that particular passage to place us together in presence of what we had now to live with as we could, my dreadful liability to impressions of the order so vividly exemplified, and my companion's knowledge henceforth—a knowledge half consternation and half compassion—of that liability. There had been this evening, after the revelation that left me for an hour so prostrate—there had been for either of us no attendance on any service but a little service of tears and vows, of prayers and promises, a climax to the series of mutual challenges and pledges that had straightway ensued on our retreating together to the schoolroom and shutting ourselves up there to have everything out. The result of our having everything out was simply to reduce our situation to the last rigour of its elements. She herself had seen nothing, not the shadow of a shadow, and nobody in the house but the governess was in the governess's plight; yet she accepted without directly impugning my sanity the truth as I gave it to her, and ended by showing me on this ground an awestricken tenderness, a deference to my more than questionable privilege, of which the very breath has remained with me as that of the sweetest of human charities.

What was settled between us accordingly that night was that we thought we might bear things together; and I was not even sure that in spite of her exemption it was she who had the best of the burden. I knew at this hour, I think, as well as I knew later, what I was capable of meeting to shelter my pupils; but it took me some time to be wholly sure of what my honest comrade was prepared for to keep terms with so stiff an agreement. I was queer company enough—quite as queer as the company I received; but as I trace over what we went through I see how

much common ground we must have found in the one idea that, by good fortune, *could* steady us. It was the idea, the second movement, that led me straight out, as I may say, of the inner chamber of my dread. I could take the air in the court, at least, and there Mrs. Grose could join me. Perfectly can I recall now the particular way strength came to me before we separated for the night. We had gone over and over every feature of what I had seen.

"He was looking for someone else, you say—someone who was not you?"

"He was looking for little Miles." A portentous clearness now possessed me. "*That's* whom he was looking for."

"But how do you know?"

"I know, I know, I know!" My exaltation grew. "And *you* know, my dear!"

She didn't deny this, but I required, I felt, not even so much telling as that. She took it up again in a moment. "What if *he* should see him?"

"Little Miles? That's what he wants!"

She looked immensely scared again. "The child?"

"Heaven forbid! The man. He wants to appear to *them*." That he might was an awful conception, and yet somehow I could keep it at bay; which moreover, as we lingered there, was what I succeeded in practically proving. I had an absolute certainty that I should see again what I had already seen, but something within me said that by offering myself bravely as the sole subject of such experience, by accepting, by inviting, by surmounting it all, I should serve as an expiatory victim and guard the tranquillity of the rest of the household. The children in especial I should thus fence about and absolutely save. I recall one of the last things I said that night to Mrs. Grose.

"It does strike me that my pupils have never mentioned—!"

She looked at me hard as I musingly pulled up. "His having been here and the time they were with him?"

"The time they were with him, and his name, his presence, his history, in any way. They've never alluded to it."

"Oh, the little lady doesn't remember. She never heard or knew."

"The circumstances of his death?" I thought with some intensity. "Perhaps not. But Miles would remember—Miles would know."

"Ah, don't try him!" broke from Mrs. Grose.

I returned her the look she had given me. "Don't be afraid." I continued to think. "It is rather odd."

"That he has never spoken of him?"

"Never by the least reference. And you tell me they were 'great friends'?"

"Oh, it wasn't *him*!" Mrs. Grose with emphasis declared. "It was Quint's own fancy. To play with him, I mean—to spoil him." She paused a moment; then she added: "Quint was much too free."

This gave me, straight from my vision of his face—*such* a face!—a sudden sickness of disgust. "Too free with *my* boy?"

"Too free with every one!"

I forbore for the moment to analyse this description further than by the reflection that a part of it applied to several of the members of the household, of the half-dozen maids and men who were still of our small colony. But there was everything, for our apprehension, in the lucky fact that no discomfortable legend, no perturbation of scullions, had ever, within any one's memory, attached to the kind old place. It had neither bad name nor ill fame, and Mrs. Grose, most apparently, only desired to cling to me and to quake in silence. I even put her, the very last thing of all, to the test. It was when, at midnight, she had her hand on the schoolroom door to take leave. "I *have* it from you, then—for it's of great importance—that he was definitely and admittedly bad?"

"Oh, not admittedly. I knew it—but the master didn't."

"And you never told him?"

"Well, he didn't like tale-bearing—he hated complaints. He was terribly short with anything of that kind, and if people were all right to *him*—"

"He wouldn't be bothered with more?" This squared well enough with my impression of him: he was not a trouble-loving gentleman, nor so very particular perhaps about some of the company he himself kept. All the same, I pressed my informant. "I promise you I would have told!"

She felt my discrimination. "I dare say I was wrong. But really I was afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of things that man could do. Quint was so clever—he was so deep."

I took this in still more than I probably showed. "You weren't afraid of anything else? Not of his effect—?"

"His effect?" she repeated with a face of anguish and waiting while I faltered.

"On innocent little precious lives. They were in your charge."

"No, they weren't in mine!" she roundly and distressfully

returned. "The master believed in him and placed him here because he was supposed not to be quite in health and the country air so good for him. So he had everything to say. Yes"—she let me have it—"even about *them*."

"Them—that creature?" I had to smother a kind of howl. "And you could bear it?"

"No. I couldn't—and I can't now!" And the poor woman burst into tears.

A rigid control, from the next day, was, as I have said, to follow them; yet how often and how passionately, for a week, we came back together to the subject! Much as we had discussed it that Sunday night, I was, in the immediate later hours in especial—for it may be imagined whether I slept—still haunted with the shadow of something she had not told me. I myself had kept back nothing, but there was a word Mrs. Grose had kept back. I was sure, moreover, by morning that this was not from a failure of frankness, but because on every side there were fears. It seems to me indeed, in raking it all over, that by the time the morrow's sun was high I had restlessly read into the facts before us almost all the meaning they were to receive from subsequent and more cruel occurrences. What they gave me, above all, was just the sinister figure of the living man—the dead one would keep awhile!—and of the months he had continuously passed at Bly, which, added up, made a formidable stretch. The limit of this evil time had arrived only when, on the dawn of a winter's morning, Peter Quint was found, by a labourer going to early work, stone dead on the road from the village: a catastrophe explained—superficially at least—by a visible wound to his head; such a wound as might have been produced (and as, on the final evidence, *had* been) by a fatal slip, in the dark and after leaving the public-house, on the steepish icy slope, a wrong path altogether, at the bottom of which he lay. The icy slope, the turn mistaken at night and in liquor, accounted for much—practically, in the end and after the inquest and boundless chatter, for everything; but there had been matters in his life—strange passages and perils, secret disorders, vices more than suspected, that would have accounted for a good deal more.

I scarce know how to put my story into words that shall be a credible picture of my state of mind; but I was in these days literally able to find a joy in the extraordinary flight of heroism the occasion demanded of me. I now saw that I had been asked for a service admirable and difficult; and there would be a greatness in letting it be seen—oh, in the right quarter!—that I could succeed where many another girl might have failed. It was

an immense help to me—I confess I rather applaud myself as I look back!—that I saw my response so strongly and so simply. I was there to protect and defend the little creatures in the world the most bereaved and the most lovable, the appeal of whose helplessness had suddenly become only too explicit, a deep, constant ache of one's own engaged affection. We were cut off, really, together; we were united in our danger. They had nothing but me, and I—well, I had *them*. It was, in short, a magnificent chance. This chance presented itself to me in an image richly material. I was a screen—I was to stand before them. The more I saw the less they would. I began to watch them in a stifled suspense, a disguised tension, that might well, had it continued too long, have turned to something like madness. What saved me, as I now see, was that it turned to another matter altogether. It didn't last as suspense—it was superseded by horrible proofs. Proofs, I say, yes—from the moment I really took hold.

This moment dated from an afternoon hour that I happened to spend in the grounds with the younger of my pupils alone. We had left Miles indoors, on the red cushion of a deep window-seat; he had wished to finish a book, and I had been glad to encourage a purpose so laudable in a young man whose only defect was a certain ingenuity of restlessness. His sister, on the contrary, had been alert to come out, and I strolled with her half an hour, seeking the shade, for the sun was still high and the day exceptionally warm. I was aware afresh with her, as we went, of how, like her brother, she contrived—it was the charming thing in both children—to let me alone without appearing to drop me and to accompany me without appearing to oppress. They were never importunate and yet never listless. My attention to them all really went to seeing them amuse themselves immensely without me: this was a spectacle they seemed actively to prepare and that employed me as an active admirer. I walked in a world of their invention—they had no occasion whatever to draw upon mine; so that my time was taken only with being for them some remarkable person or thing that the game of the moment required and that was merely, thanks to my superior, my exalted stamp, a happy and highly distinguished sinecure. I forget what I was on the present occasion; I only remember that I was something very important and very quiet and that Flora was playing very hard. We were on the edge of the lake, and, as we had lately begun geography, the lake was the Sea of Azof.

Suddenly, amid these elements, I became aware that on the other side of the Sea, of Azof we had an interested spectator. The

way this knowledge gathered in me was the strangest thing in the world—the strangest, that is, except the very much stranger in which it quickly merged itself. I had sat down with a piece of work—for I was something or other that could sit—on the old stone bench which overlooked the pond ; and in this position I began to take in with certitude and yet without direct vision the presence, a good way off, of a third person. The old trees, the thick shrubbery, made a great and pleasant shade, but it was all suffused with the brightness of the hot, still hour. There was no ambiguity in anything ; none whatever, at least, in the conviction I from one moment to another found myself forming as to what I should see straight before me and across the lake as a consequence of raising my eyes. They were attached at this juncture to the stitching in which I was engaged, and I can feel once more the spasm of my effort not to move them till I should so have steadied myself as to be able to make up my mind what to do. There was an alien object in view—a figure whose right of presence I instantly and passionately questioned. I recollect counting over perfectly the possibilities, reminding myself that nothing was more natural, for instance, than the appearance of one of the men about the place, or even of a messenger, a postman or a tradesman's boy, from the village. That reminder had as little effect on my practical certitude as I was conscious—still even without looking—of its having upon the character and attitude of our visitor. Nothing was more natural than that these things should be the other things they absolutely were not.

Of the positive identity of the apparition I would assure myself as soon as the small clock of my courage should have ticked out the right second ; meanwhile, with an effort that was already sharp enough, I transferred my eyes straight to little Flora, who, at the moment, was about ten yards away. My heart had stood still for an instant with the wonder and terror of the question whether she too would see ; and I held my breath while I waited for what a cry from her, what some sudden innocent sign either of interest or of alarm, would tell me. I waited, but nothing came ; then in the first place—and there is something more dire in this, I feel, than in anything I have to relate—I was determined by a sense that within a minute all spontaneous sounds from her had dropped ; and in the second by the circumstance that also within the minute she had, in her play, turned her back to the water. This was her attitude when I at last looked at her—looked with the confirmed conviction that we were still, together, under direct personal notice. She had picked up a small, flat piece of wood,

which happened to have in it a little hole that had evidently suggested to her the idea of sticking in another fragment that might figure as a mast and make the thing a boat. This second morsel, as I watched her, she was very markedly and intently attempting to tighten in its place. My apprehension of what she was doing sustained me so that after some seconds I felt I was ready for more. Then I again shifted my eyes—I faced what I had to face.

7

I got hold of Mrs. Grose as soon after this as I could ; and I can give no intelligible account of how I fought out the interval. Yet I still hear myself cry as I fairly threw myself into her arms : “ They *know*—it’s too monstrous : they know, they know ! ”

“ And what on earth— ? ” I felt her incredulity as she held me.

“ Why, all that *we* know—and heaven knows what more besides ! ” Then as she released me I made it out to her, made it out perhaps only now with full coherency even to myself. “ Two hours ago, in the garden ”—I could scarce articulate—“ Flora *saw* ! ”

Mrs. Grose took it as she might have taken a blow in the stomach. “ She has told you ? ” she panted.

“ Not a word—that’s the horror. She kept it to herself ! The child of eight, *that* child ! ” Unutterable still for me was the stupefaction of it.

Mrs. Grose of course could only gape the wider. “ Then how do you know ? ”

“ I was there—I saw with my eyes : saw she was perfectly aware.”

“ Do you mean aware of *him* ? ”

“ No—of *her*.” I was conscious as I spoke that I looked prodigious things, for I got the slow reflection of them in my companion’s face. “ Another person—this time ; but a figure of quite as unmistakable horror and evil ; a woman in black, pale and dreadful—with such an air also, and such a face !—on the other side of the lake. I was there with the child—quiet for the hour ; and in the midst of it she came.”

“ Came how—from where ? ”

“ From where they come from ! She just appeared and stood there—but not so near.”

“ And without coming nearer ? ”

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

"Oh, for the effect and the feeling she might have been as close as you!"

My friend, with an odd impulse, fell back a step. "Was she someone you've never seen?"

"Never. But someone the child has. Someone *you* have." Then to show how I had thought it all out: "My predecessor—the one who died."

"Miss Jessel?"

"Miss Jessel. You don't believe me?" I pressed.

She turned right and left in her distress. "How can you be sure?"

This drew from me, in the state of my nerves, a flash of impatience. "Then ask Flora—*she's* sure!" But I had no sooner spoken than I caught myself up. "No, for God's sake, *don't*. She'll say she isn't—she'll lie!"

Mrs. Grose was not too bewildered instinctively to protest. "Ah, how *can* you?"

"Because I'm clear. Flora doesn't want me to know."

"It's only then to spare you."

"No, no—there are depths, depths! The more I go over it the more I see in it, and the more I see in it the more I fear. I don't know what I *don't* see—what I *don't* fear!"

Mrs. Grose tried to keep up with me. "You mean you're afraid of seeing her again?"

"Oh, no; that's nothing—now!" Then I explained. "It's of *not* seeing her."

But my companion only looked wan. "I don't understand."

"Why, it's that the child may keep it up—and that the child assuredly *will*—without my knowing it."

At the image of this possibility Mrs. Grose for a moment collapsed, yet presently to pull herself together again as from the positive force of the sense of what, should we yield an inch, there would really be to give way to. "Dear, dear—we must keep our heads! And after all, if she doesn't mind it—!" She even tried a grim joke. "Perhaps she likes it!"

"Like *such* things—a scrap of an infant!"

"Isn't it just a proof of her blest innocence?" my friend bravely inquired.

She brought me, for the instant, almost round. "Oh, we must clutch at *that*—we must cling to it! If it isn't a proof of what you say, it's a proof of—God knows what! For the woman's a horror of horrors."

Mrs. Grose, at this, fixed her eyes a minute on the ground; then at last raising them, "Tell me how *you* know," she said.

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

"Then you admit it's what she was?" I cried.

"Tell me how you know," my friend simply repeated.

"Know? By seeing her! By the way she looked."

"At you, do you mean—so wickedly?"

"Dear me, no—I could have borne that. She gave me never a glance. She only fixed the child."

Mrs. Grose tried to see it. "Fixed her?"

"Ah, with such awful eyes!"

She stared at mine as if they might really have resembled them.

"Do you mean of dislike?"

"God help us, no. Of something much worse."

"Worse than dislike?"—this left her indeed at a loss.

"With a determination—indescribable. With a kind of fury of intention."

I made her turn pale. "Intention?"

"To get hold of her." Mrs. Grose—her eyes just lingering on mine—gave a shudder and walked to the window; and while she stood there looking out I completed my statement. "*That's* what Flora knows."

After a little she turned round. "The person was in black, you say?"

"In mourning—rather poor, almost shabby. But—yes—with extraordinary beauty." I now recognised to what I had at last, stroke by stroke, brought the victim of my confidence, for she quite visibly weighed this. "Oh, handsome—very, very," I insisted; "wonderfully handsome. But infamous."

She slowly came back to me. "Miss Jessel—*was* infamous." She once more took my hand in both her own, holding it as tight as if to fortify me against the increase of alarm I might draw from this disclosure. "They were both infamous," she finally said.

So for a little we faced it once more together; and I found absolutely a degree of help in seeing it now so straight. "I appreciate," I said, "the great decency of your not having hitherto spoken; but the time has certainly come to give me the whole thing." She appeared to assent to this, but still only in silence; seeing which I went on: "I must have it now. Of what did she die? Come, there was something between them."

"There was everything."

"In spite of the difference—?"

"Oh, of their rank, their condition"—she brought it woefully out. "*She* was a lady."

I turned it over; I again saw. "Yes—she was a lady."

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

"And he so dreadfully below," said Mrs. Grose.

I felt that I doubtless needn't press too hard, in such company, on the place of a servant in the scale ; but there was nothing to prevent an acceptance of my companion's own measure of my predecessor's abasement. There was a way to deal with that, and I dealt ; the more readily for my full vision—on the evidence—of our employer's late good-looking "own" man ; impudent, assured, spoiled, depraved. "The fellow was a hound."

Mrs. Grose considered as if it were perhaps a little a case for a sense of shades. "I've never seen one like him. He did what *he* wished."

"With *her* ?"

"With them all."

It was as if now in my friend's own eyes Miss Jessel had again appeared. I seemed at any rate for an instant to trace their evocation of her as distinctly as I had seen her by the pond ; and I brought out with decision : "It must have been also what *she* wished !"

Mrs. Grose's face signified that it had been indeed, but she said at the same time : "Poor woman—she paid for it !"

"Then you do know what she died of ?" I asked.

"No—I know nothing. I wanted not to know ; I was glad enough I didn't ; and I thanked heaven she was well out of this !"

"Yet you had then your idea—"

"Of her real reason for leaving ? Oh, yes—as to that. She couldn't have stayed. Fancy it here—for a governess ! And afterwards I imagined—and I still imagine. And what I imagine is dreadful."

"Not so dreadful as what *I* do," I replied ; on which I must have shown her—as I was indeed but too conscious—a front of miserable defeat. It brought out again all her compassion for me, and at the renewed touch of her kindness my power to resist broke down. I burst, as I had the other time made her burst, into tears ; she took me to her motherly breast, and my lamentation overflowed. "I don't do it !" I sobbed in despair ; "I don't save or shield them ! It's far worse than I dreamed. They're lost !"

8

WHAT I had said to Mrs. Grose was true enough, there were in the matter I had put before her depths and possibilities that I lacked resolution to sound, so that when we met once more in the wonder of it we were of a common mind about the duty of

resistance to extravagant fancies. We were to keep our heads if we should keep nothing else—difficult indeed as that might be in the face of all that, in our prodigious experience, seemed least to be questioned. Late that night, while the house slept, we had another talk in my room ; when she went all the way with me as to its being beyond doubt that I had seen exactly what I had seen. I found that to keep her thoroughly in the grip of this I had only to ask her how, if I had “made it up,” I came to be able to give, of each of the persons appearing to me, a picture disclosing, to the last detail, their special marks—a portrait on the exhibition of which she had instantly recognised and named them. She wished, of course—small blame to her !—to sink the whole subject ; and I was quick to assure her that my own interest in it had now violently taken the form of a search for the way to escape from it. I closed with her cordially on the article of the likelihood that with recurrence—for recurrence we took for granted—I should get used to my danger ; distinctly professing that my personal exposure had suddenly become the least of my discomforts. It was my new suspicion that was intolerable ; and yet even to this complication the later hours of the day had brought a little ease.

On leaving her, after my first outbreak, I had of course returned to my pupils, associating the right remedy for my dismay with that sense of their charm which I had already recognised as a resource I could positively cultivate and which had never failed me yet. I had simply, in other words, plunged afresh into Flora’s special society and there become aware—it was almost a luxury !—that she could put her little conscious hand straight upon the spot that ached. She had looked at me in sweet speculation and then had accused me to my face of having “cried.” I had supposed the ugly signs of it brushed away ; but I could literally—for the time, at all events—rejoice, under this fathomless charity, that they had not entirely disappeared. To gaze into the depths of blue of the child’s eyes and pronounce their loveliness a trick of premature cunning was to be guilty of a cynicism in preference to which I naturally preferred to abjure my judgement and, so far as might be, my agitation. I couldn’t abjure for merely wanting to, but I could repeat to Mrs. Grose—as I did there, over and over, in the small hours—that with our small friends’ voices in the air, their pressure on one’s heart and their fragrant faces against one’s cheek, everything fell to the ground but their incapacity and their beauty. It was a pity that, somehow, to settle this once for all, I had equally to re-enumerate the signs of subtlety that, in the afternoon, by the lake, had made a

miracle of my show of self-possession. It was a pity to be obliged to reinvestigate the certitude of the moment itself and repeat how it had come to me as a revelation that the inconceivable communion I then surprised must have been for both parties a matter of habit. It was a pity I should have had to quaver out again, the reasons for my not having, in my delusion, so much as questioned that the little girl saw our visitant even as I actually saw Mrs. Grose herself, and that she wanted, by just so much as she did thus see, to make me suppose she didn't, and at the same time, without showing anything, arrive at a guess as to whether I myself did ! It was a pity I needed to recapitulate the portentous little activities by which she sought to divert my attention—the perceptible increase of movement, the greater intensity of play, the singing, the gabbling of nonsense and the invitation to romp.

Yet if I had not indulged, to prove there was nothing in it, in this review, I should have missed the two or three dim elements of comfort that still remained to me. I shouldn't, for instance, have been able to asseverate to my friend that I was certain—which was so much to the good—that *I* at least had not betrayed myself. I shouldn't have been prompted, by stress of need, by desperation of mind—I scarce know what to call it—to invoke such further aid to intelligence as might spring from pushing my colleague fairly to the wall. She had told me, bit by bit, under pressure, a great deal ; but a small shifty spot on the wrong side of it all still sometimes brushed my brow like the wing of a bat ; and I remember how on this occasion—for the sleeping house and the concentration alike of our danger and our watch seemed to help—I felt the importance of giving the last jerk to the curtain. “ I don't believe anything so horrible,” I recollect saying ; “ no, let us put it definitely, my dear, that I don't. But if I did, you know, that's a thing I should require now, just without sparing you the least bit more—oh, not a scrap, come !—to get out of you. What was it you had in mind when, in our distress, before Miles came back, over the letter from his school, you said, under my insistence, that you didn't pretend for him he hadn't literally *ever* been ‘ bad ? ’ He has *not*, truly, ‘ ever,’ in these weeks that I myself have lived with him and so closely watched him ; he has been an imperturbable little prodigy of delightful, lovable goodness. Therefore you might perfectly have made the claim for him if you had not, as it happened, seen an exception to take. What was your exception, and to what passage in your personal observation of him did you refer ? ”

It was a straight question enough, but levity was not our note,

and in any case I had before the grey dawn admonished us to separate got my answer. What my friend had had in mind proved immensely to the purpose. It was neither more nor less than the particular fact that for a period of several months Quint and the boy had been perpetually together. It was, indeed, the very appropriate item of evidence of her having ventured to criticise the propriety, to hint at the incongruity, of so close an alliance, and even to go so far on the subject as a frank overture to Miss Jessel would take her. Miss Jessel had, with a very high manner about it, requested her to mind her business, and the good woman had on this directly approached little Miles. What she had said to him, since I pressed, was that *she* liked to see young gentlemen not forget their station.

I pressed again, of course, the closer for that. "You reminded him that Quint was only a base menial?"

"As you might say! And it was his answer, for one thing, that was bad."

"And for another thing?" I waited. "He repeated your words to Quint?"

"No, not that. It's just what he *wouldn't*!" she could still impress on me. "I was sure, at any rate," she added, "that he didn't. But he denied certain occasions."

"What occasions?"

"When they had been about together quite as if Quint were his tutor—and a very grand one—and Miss Jessel only for the little lady. When he had gone off with the fellow, I mean, and spent hours with him."

"He then prevaricated about it—he said he hadn't?" Her assent was clear enough to cause me to add in a moment: "I see. He lied."

"Oh!" Mrs. Grose mumbled. This was a suggestion that it didn't matter; which indeed she backed up by a further remark. "You see, after all, Miss Jessel didn't mind. She didn't forbid him."

I considered. "Did he put that to you as a justification?"

At this she dropped again. "No, he never spoke of it."

"Never mentioned her in connection with Quint?"

She saw, visibly flushing, where I was coming out. "Well, he didn't show anything. He denied," she repeated; "he denied."

Lord, how I pressed her now! "So that you could see he knew what was between the two wretches?"

"I don't know—I don't know!" the poor woman wailed.

"You do know, you dear thing," I replied ; "only you haven't my dreadful boldness of mind, and you keep back, out of timidity, and modesty and delicacy, even the impression that in the past, when you had, without my aid, to flounder about in silence, most of all made you miserable. But I shall get it out of you yet! There was something in the boy that suggested to you," I continued, "his covering and concealing their relation."

"Oh, he couldn't prevent—"

"Your learning the truth? I dare say! But, heavens," I fell, with vehemence, a-thinking, "what it shows that they must, to that extent, have succeeded in making of him!"

"Ah, nothing that's not nice *now*!" Mrs. Grose lugubriously pleaded.

"I don't wonder you looked queer," I persisted, "when I mentioned to you the letter from his school!"

"I doubt if I looked as queer as you!" she retorted with homely force. "And if he was so bad then as that comes to, how is he such an angel now?"

"Yes, indeed—and if he was a fiend at school! How, how, how? Well," I said in my torment, "you must put it to me again, though I shall not be able to tell you for some days. Only put it to me again!" I cried in a way that made my friend stare. "There are directions in which I mustn't for the present let myself go." Meanwhile I returned to her first example—the one to which she had just previously referred—of the boy's happy capacity for an occasional slip. "If Quint—on your remonstrance at the time you speak of—was a base menial, one of the things Miles said to you, I find myself guessing, was that you were another." Again her admission was so adequate that I continued: "And you forgave him that?"

"Wouldn't *you*?"

"Oh, yes!" And we exchanged there, in the stillness, a sound of the oddest amusement. Then I went on: "At all events, while he was with the man—"

"Miss Flora was with the woman. It suited them all!"

It suited me too, I felt, only too well; by which I mean that it suited exactly the particular deadly view I was in the very act of forbidding myself to entertain. But I so far succeeded in checking the expression of this view that I will throw, just here, no further light on it than may be offered by the mention of my final observation to Mrs. Grose. "His having lied and been impudent are, I confess, less engaging specimens than I had hoped to have from you of the outbreak in him of the little

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

natural man. Still," I mused, "they must do, for they make me feel more than ever that I must watch."

It made me blush, the next minute, to see in my friend's face how much more unreservedly she had forgiven him than her anecdote struck me as pointing out to my own tenderness any way to do. This was marked when, at the schoolroom door, she quitted me. "Surely you don't accuse *him*—"

"Of carrying on an intercourse that he conceals from me? Ah, remember that, until further evidence, I now accuse nobody." Then before shutting her out to go by another passage to her own place. "I must just wait," I wound up.

9

I WAITED and I waited, and the days took as they clapsed something from my consternation. A very few of them, in fact, passing, in constant sight of my pupils, without a fresh incident, sufficed to give to grievous fancies and even to odious memories a kind of brush of the sponge. I have spoken of the surrender to their extraordinary childish grace as a thing I could actively promote in myself, and it may be imagined if I neglected now to apply at this source for whatever balm it would yield. Stranger than I can express, certainly, was the effort to struggle against my new lights. It would doubtless have been a greater tension still, however, had it not been so frequently successful. I used to wonder how my little charges could help guessing that I thought strange things about them; and the circumstance that these things only made them more interesting was not by itself a direct aid to keeping them in the dark. I trembled lest they should see that they *were* so immensely more interesting. Putting things at the worst, at all events, as in meditation I so often did, any clouding of their innocence could only be—blameless and foredoomed as they were—a reason the more for taking risks. There were moments when I knew myself to catch them up by an irresistible impulse and press them to my heart. As soon as I had done so I used to wonder: "What will they think of that? Doesn't it betray too much?" It would have been easy to get into a sad, wild tangle about how much I might betray; but the real account, I feel, of the hours of peace I could still enjoy was that the immediate charm of my companions was a beguilement still effective even under the shadow of the possibility that it was studied. For if it occurred to me that I might occasionally excite suspicion by the little outbreaks of my sharper passion for them,

so too I remember asking if I mightn't see a queerness in the traceable increase of their own demonstrations.

They were at this period extravagantly and preternaturally fond of me ; which, after all, I could reflect, was no more than a graceful response in children perpetually bowed down over and hugged. The homage of which they were so lavish succeeded in truth for my nerves quite as well as if I never appeared to myself, as I may say, literally to catch them at a purpose in it. They had never, I think, wanted to do so many things for their poor protectress ; I mean—though they got their lessons better and better, which was naturally what would please her most—in the way of diverting, entertaining, surprising her ; reading her passages, telling her stories, acting her charades, pouncing out at her, in disguises, as animals and historical characters, and above all, astonishing her by the “pieces” they had secretly got by heart and could interminably recite. I should never get to the bottom—were I to let myself go even now—of the prodigious private commentary, all under still more private correction, with which I in these days overscored their full hours. They had shown me from the first a facility for everything, a general faculty which, taking a fresh start, achieved remarkable flights. They got their little tasks as if they loved them ; they indulged, from the mere exuberance of the gift, in the most unimposed little miracles of memory. They not only popped out at me as tigers and as Romans, but as Shakespearians, astronomers, and navigators. This was so singularly the case that it had presumably much to do with the fact as to which, at the present day, I am at a loss for a different explanation : I allude to my unnatural composure on the subject of another school for Miles. What I remember is that I was content for the time not to open the question, and that contentment must have sprung from the sense of his perpetually striking show of cleverness. He was too clever for a bad governess, for a parson's daughter, to spoil ; and the strangest if not the brightest thread in the pensive embroidery I just spoke of was the impression I might have got, if I had dared to work it out, that he was under some influence operating in his small intellectual life as a tremendous incitement.

If it was easy to reflect, however, that such a boy could postpone school, it was at least as marked that for such a boy to have been “kicked out” by a schoolmaster was a mystification without end. Let me add that in their company now—and I was careful almost never to be out of it—I could follow no scent very far. We lived in a cloud of music and affection and success and private theatricals. The musical sense in each of the children was of

the quickest, but the elder in especial had a marvellous knack of catching and repeating. The schoolroom piano broke into all gruesome fancies ; and when that failed there were confabulations in corners, with a sequel of one of them going out in the highest spirits in order to " come in " as something new. I had had brothers myself, and it was no revelation to me that little girls could be slavish idolaters of little boys. What surpassed everything was that there was a little boy in the world who could have for the inferior age, sex, and intelligence so fine a consideration. They were extraordinarily at one, and to say that they never either quarrelled or complained is to make the note of praise coarse for their quality of sweetness. Sometimes perhaps indeed (when I dropped into coarseness) I came across traces of little understandings between them by which one of them should keep me occupied while the other slipped away. There is a naïf side, I suppose, in all diplomacy ; but if my pupils practised upon me it was surely with the minimum of grossness. It was all in the other quarter that, after a lull, the grossness broke out.

I find that I really hang back ; but I must take my horrid plunge. In going on with the record of what was hideous at Bly I not only challenge the most liberal faith—for which I little care ; but (and this is another matter) I renew what I myself suffered, I again push my dreadful way through it to the end. There came suddenly an hour after which, as I look back, the business seems to me to have been all pure suffering ; but I have at least reached the heart of it, and the straightest road out is doubtless to advance. One evening—with nothing to lead up or prepare it—I felt the cold touch of the impression that had breathed on me the night of my arrival and which, much lighter then as I have mentioned, I should probably have made little of in memory had my subsequent sojourn been less agitated. I had not gone to bed ; I sat reading by a couple of candles. There was a roomful of old books at Bly—last-century fiction some of it, which, to the extent of a distinctly deprecated renown, but never to so much as that of a stray specimen, had reached the sequestered home and appealed to the unavowed curiosity of my youth. I remember that the book I had in my hand was Fielding's *Amelia* ; also that I was wholly awake. I recall further both a general conviction that it was horribly late and a particular objection to looking at my watch. I figure finally that the white curtain draping, in the fashion of those days, the head of Flora's little bed, shrouded, as I had assured myself long before, the perfection of childish rest. I recollect in short that though I was deeply interested in my

author I found myself, at the turn of a page and with his spell all scattered, looking straight up from him and hard at the door of my room. There was a moment during which I listened, reminded of the faint sense I had had, the first night, of there being something undefinably astir in the house, and noted the soft breath of the open casement just move the half-drawn blind. Then, with all the marks of a deliberation that must have seemed magnificent had there been any one to admire it, I laid down my book, rose to my feet and, taking a candle, went straight out of the room and, from the passage, on which my light made little impression, noiselessly closed and locked the door.

I can say now neither what determined nor what guided me, but I went straight along the lobby, holding my candle high, till I came within sight of the tall window that presided over the great turn of the staircase. At this point I precipitately found myself aware of three things. They were practically simultaneous, yet they had flashes of succession. My candle, under a bold flourish, went out, and I perceived, by the uncovered window, that the yielding dusk of earliest morning rendered it unnecessary. Without it, the next instant, I knew that there was a figure on the stair. I speak of sequences, but I required no lapse of seconds to stiffen myself for a third encounter with Quint. The apparition had reached the landing half-way up and was therefore on the spot nearest the window, where, at sight of me, it stopped short and fixed me exactly as it had fixed me from the tower and from the garden. He knew me as well as I knew him ; and so, in the cold, faint twilight, with a glimmer in the high glass and another on the polish of the oak stair below, we faced each other in our common intensity. He was absolutely, on this occasion, a living, detestable, dangerous presence. But that was not the wonder of wonders ; I reserve this distinction for quite another circumstance : the circumstance that dread had unmistakably quitted me and that there was nothing in me unable to meet and measure him.

I had plenty of anguish after that extraordinary moment, but I had, thank God, no terror. And he knew I hadn't—I found myself at the end of an instant magnificently aware of this. I felt, in a fierce rigour of confidence, that if I stood my ground a minute I should cease—for the time at least—to have him to reckon with ; and during the minute, accordingly, the thing was as human and hideous as a real interview : hideous just because it *was* human, as human as to have met alone, in the small hours, in a sleeping house, some enemy, some adventurer, some criminal. It was the dead silence of our long gaze at such close quarters that

gave the whole horror, huge as it was, its only note of the unnatural. If I had met a murderer in such a place and at such an hour we still at least would have spoken. Something would have passed, in life, between us ; if nothing had passed one of us would have moved. The moment was so prolonged that it would have taken but little more to make me doubt if even I were in life. I can't express what followed it save by saying that the silence itself—which was indeed in a manner an attestation of my strength—became the element into which I saw the figure disappear ; in which I definitely saw it turn, as I might have seen the low wretch to which it had once belonged turn on receipt of an order, and pass, with my eyes on the villainous back that no hunch could have more disfigured, straight down the staircase and into the darkness in which the next bend was lost.

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I REMAINED awhile at the top of the stair, but with the effect presently of understanding that when my visitor had gone, he had gone ; then I returned to my room. The foremost thing I saw there by the light of the candle I had left burning was that Flora's little bed was empty ; and on this I caught my breath with all the terror that, five minutes before, I had been able to resist. I dashed at the place in which I had left her lying and over which—for the small silk counterpane and the sheets were disarranged—the white curtains had been deceivingly pulled forward ; then my step, to my unutterable relief, produced an answering sound : I noticed an agitation of the window-blind, and the child, ducking down, emerged rosily from the other side of it. She stood there in so much of her candour and so little of her night-gown, with her pink bare feet and the golden glow of her curls. She looked intensely grave, and I had never had such a sense of losing an advantage acquired (the thrill of which had just been so prodigious) as on my consciousness that she addressed me with a reproach : “ You naughty : where *have* you been ? ” Instead of challenging her own irregularity I found myself arraigned and explaining. She herself explained, for that matter, with the loveliest, eagerest simplicity. She had known suddenly, as she lay there, that I was out of the room, and had jumped up to see what had become of me. I had dropped, with the joy of her reappearance, back into my chair—feeling then, and then only, a little faint ; and she had pattered straight over to me, thrown herself upon my knee, given herself to be held with the

flame of the candle full in the wonderful little face that was still flushed with sleep. I remember closing my eyes an instant, yieldingly, consciously, as before the excess of something beautiful that shone out of the blue of her own. "You were looking for me out of the window?" I said. "You thought I might be walking in the grounds?"

"Well, you know, I thought someone was"—she never blanchd as she smiled out that at me.

Oh, how I looked at her now! "And did you see any one?"

"Ah, *no*!" she returned almost (with the full privilege of childish inconsequence) resentfully, though with a long sweetness in her little drawl of the negative.

At the moment, in the state of my nerves, I absolutely believed she lied; and if I once more closed my eyes it was before the dazzle of the three or four possible ways in which I might take this up. One of these for a moment tempted me with such singular force that, to resist it, I must have gripped my little girl with a spasm that, wonderfully, she submitted to without a cry or a sign of fright. Why not break out at her on the spot and have it all over?—give it to her straight in her lovely little lighted face? "You see, you see, you *know* that you do and that you already quite suspect I believe it; therefore why not frankly confess it to me, so that we may at least live with it together and learn perhaps, in the strangeness of our fate, where we are and what it means?" This solicitation dropped, alas, as it came: if I could immediately have succumbed to it I might have spared myself—well, you'll see what. Instead of succumbing I sprang again to my feet, looked at her bed and took a helpless middle way. "Why did you pull the curtain over the place to make me think you were still there?"

Flora luminously considered; after which, with her little divine smile: "Because I don't like to frighten you!"

"But if I had, by your idea, gone out—?"

She absolutely declined to be puzzled; she turned her eyes to the flame of the candle as if the question were as irrelevant, or at any rate as impersonal, as Mrs. Marcet or nine-times-nine. "Oh, but you know," she quite adequately answered, "that you might come back, you dear, and that you *have*!" And after a little, when she had gone into bed, I had, a long time, by almost sitting on her for the retention of her hand, to show how I recognised the pertinence of my return.

You may imagine the general complexion, from that moment, of my nights. I repeatedly sat up till I didn't know when; I selected moments when my room-mate unmistakably slept, and,

stealing out, took noiseless turns in the passage. I even pushed as far as to where I had last met Quint. But I never met him there again, and I may as well say at once that I on no other occasion saw him in the house. I just missed, on the staircase, nevertheless, a different adventure. Looking down it from the top I once recognised the presence of a woman seated on one of the lower steps with her back presented to me, her body half-bowed and her head, in an attitude of woe, in her hands. I had been there but an instant, however, when she vanished without looking round at me. I knew, for all that, exactly what dreadful face she had to show ; and I wondered whether, if instead of being above I had been below, I should have had the same nerve for going up that I had lately shown Quint. Well, there continued to be plenty of call for nerve. On the eleventh night after my latest encounter with that gentleman—they were all numbered now—I had an alarm that perilously skirted it and that indeed, from the particular quality of its unexpectedness, proved quite my sharpest shock. It was precisely the first night during this series, that, weary with vigils, I had conceived I might again without laxity lay myself down at my old hour. I slept immediately and, as I afterwards knew, till about one o'clock ; but when I woke it was to sit straight up as completely roused as if a hand had shaken me. I had left a light burning, but it was now out, and I felt an instant certainty that Flora had extinguished it. This brought me to my feet and straight, in the darkness, to her bed, which I found she had left. A glance at the window enlightened me further, and the striking of a match completed the picture.

The child had again got up—this time blowing out the taper, and had again, for some purpose of observation or response, squeezed in behind the blind and was peering out into the night. That she now saw as she had not, I had satisfied myself, the previous time—was proved to me by the fact that she was disturbed neither by my re-illumination nor by the haste I made to get into slippers and into a wrap. Hidden, protected, absorbed, she evidently rested on the sill—the casement opened forward—and gave herself up. There was a great still moon to help her, and this fact had counted in my quick decision. She was face to face with the apparition we had met at the lake, and could now communicate with it as she had not then been able to do. What I, on my side, had to care for was, without disturbing her, to reach, from the corridor, some other window turned to the same quarter. I got to the door without her hearing me ; I got out of it, closed it, and listened from the other side for some sound from her. While I stood in the passage I had my eyes on her

brother's door, which was but ten steps off and which, indescribably, produced in me a renewal of the strange impulse that I lately spoke of as my temptation. What if I should go straight in and march to *his* window?—what if, by risking to his boyish bewilderment a revelation of my motive, I should throw across the rest of the mystery the long halter of my boldness?

This thought held me sufficiently to make me cross to his threshold and pause again. I preternaturally listened; I figured to myself what might portentously be; I wondered if his bed were also empty and he also secretly at watch. It was a deep soundless minute, at the end of which my impulse failed. He was quiet; he might be innocent; the risk was hideous; I turned away. There was a figure in the grounds—a figure prowling for a sight, the visitor with whom Flora was engaged; but it wasn't the visitor most concerned with my boy. I hesitated afresh, but on other grounds and only a few seconds; then I had made my choice. There were empty rooms enough at Bly, and it was only a question of choosing the right one. The right one suddenly presented itself to me as the lower one—though high above the gardens—in the solid corner of the house that I have spoken of as the old tower. This was a large, square chamber, arranged with some state as a bedroom, the extravagant size of which made it so inconvenient that it had not for years, though kept by Mrs. Grose in exemplary order, been occupied. I had often admired it and I knew my way about in it; I had only, after just faltering at the first chill gloom of its disuse, to pass across it and unbolt in all quietness one of the shutters. Achieving this transit I uncovered the glass without a sound and, applying my face to the pane, was able, the darkness without being much less than within, to see that I commanded the right direction. Then I saw something more. The moon made the night extraordinarily penetrable and showed me on the lawn a person, diminished by distance, who stood there motionless and as if fascinated, looking up to where I had appeared—looking, that is, not so much straight at me as at something that was apparently above me. There was clearly another person above me—there was a person on the tower; but the presence on the lawn was not in the least what I had conceived and had confidently hurried to meet. The presence on the lawn—I felt sick as I made it out—was poor little Miles himself.

II

It was not till late next day that I spoke to Mrs. Grose ; the rigour with which I kept my pupils in sight making it often difficult to meet her privately ; the more as we each felt the importance of not provoking—on the part of the servants quite as much as on that of the children—any suspicion of a secret flurry or of a discussion of mysteries. I drew a great security in this particular from her mere smooth aspect. There was nothing in her fresh face to pass on to others the least of my horrible confidences. She believed me, I was sure, absolutely : if she hadn't I don't know what would have become of me, for I couldn't have borne the strain alone. But she was a magnificent monument to the blessing of a want of imagination, and if she could see in our little charges nothing but their beauty and amiability, their happiness and cleverness, she had no direct communication with the sources of my trouble. If they had been at all visibly blighted or battered she would doubtless have grown, on tracing it back, haggard enough to match them ; as matters stood, however, I could feel her, when she surveyed them with her large white arms folded and the habit of serenity in all her look, thank the Lord's mercy that if they were ruined the pieces would still serve. Flights of fancy gave place, in her mind, to a steady fireside glow, and I had already begun to perceive how, with the development of the conviction that—as time went on without a public accident—our young things could, after all, look out for themselves, she addressed her greatest solicitude to the sad case presented by their deputy-guardian. That, for myself, was a sound simplification : I could engage that, to the world, my face should tell no tales, but it would have been, in the conditions, an immense added worry to find myself anxious about hers.

At the hour I now speak of she had joined me, under pressure, on the terrace, where, with the lapse of the season, the afternoon sun was now agreeable ; and we sat there together while before us and at a distance, yet within call if we wished, the children strolled to and fro in one of their most manageable moods. They moved slowly, in unison, below us, over the lawn, the boy, as they went, reading aloud from a story-book and passing his arm round his sister to keep her quite in touch. Mrs. Grose watched them with positive placidity ; then I caught the suppressed intellectual creak with which she conscientiously turned to take from me a view of the back of the tapestry. I had made her a

receptacle of lurid things, but there was an odd recognition of my superiority—my accomplishments and my function—in her patience under my pain. She offered her mind to my disclosures as, had I wished to mix a witch's broth and proposed it with assurance, she would have held out a large, clean saucepan. This had become thoroughly her attitude by the time that, in my recital of the events of the night, I reached the point of what Miles had said to me when, after seeing him, at such a monstrous hour, almost on the very spot where he happened now to be, I had gone down to bring him in ; choosing then, at the window, with a concentrated need of not alarming the house, rather that method than any noisier process. I had left her meanwhile in little doubt of my small hope of representing with success even to her actual sympathy my sense of the real splendour of the little inspiration with which, after I had got him into the house, the boy met my final articulate challenge. As soon as I appeared in the moonlight on the terrace he had come to me as straight as possible ; on which I had taken his hand without a word and led him, through the dark spaces, up the staircase where Quint had so hungrily hovered for him, along the lobby where I had listened and trembled, and so to his forsaken room.

Not a sound, on the way, had passed between us, and I had wondered—oh, *how* I had wondered !—if he were groping about in his dreadful little mind for something plausible and not too grotesque. It would tax his invention certainly, and I felt, this time, over his real embarrassment, a curious thrill of triumph. It was a sharp trap for any game hitherto successful. He could play no longer at perfect propriety, nor could he pretend to it ; so how the deuce would he get out of the scrape ? There beat in me indeed, with the passionate throb of this question, an equal dumb appeal as to how the deuce *I* should. I was confronted at last, as never yet, with all the risk attached even now to sounding my own horrid note. I remember, in fact, that as we pushed into his little chamber, where the bed had not been slept in at all and the window, uncovered to the moonlight, made the place so clear that there was no need of striking a match—I remember how I suddenly dropped, sank upon the edge of the bed from the force of the idea that he must know how he really, as they say, “ had ” me. He could do what he liked, with all his cleverness to help him, so long as I should continue to defer to the old tradition of the criminality of those caretakers of the young who minister to superstitions and fears. He “ had ” me indeed, and in a cleft stick ; for who would ever absolve me, who would consent that I should be unhung, if, by the faintest tremor of an overture, I

were the first to introduce into our perfect intercourse an element so dire? No, no: it was useless to attempt to convey to Mrs. Grose, just as it is scarcely less so to attempt to suggest here, how, during our short, stiff brush there in the dark, he fairly shook me with admiration. I was of course thoroughly kind and merciful; never, never yet had I placed on his small shoulders hands of such tenderness as those with which, while I rested against the bed, I held him there well under fire. I had no alternative but, in form at least, to put it to him.

"You must tell me now—and all the truth. What did you go out for? What were you doing there?"

I can still see his wonderful smile, the whites of his beautiful eyes and the uncovering of his clear teeth, shine to me in the dusk. "If I tell you why, will you understand?" My heart, at this, leaped into my mouth. *Would* he tell me why? I found no sound on my lips to press it, and I was aware of answering only with a vague, repeated, grimacing nod. He was gentleness itself, and while I wagged my head at him he stood there more than ever a little fairy prince. It was his brightness indeed that gave me a respite. Would it be so great if he were really going to tell me? "Well," he said at last, "just exactly in order that you should do this."

"Do what?"

"Think me—for a change—*bad*!" I shall never forget the sweetness and gaiety with which he brought out the word, nor how, on top of it, he bent forward and kissed me. It was practically the end of everything. I met his kiss and I had to make, while I folded him for a minute in my arms, the most stupendous effort not to cry. He had given exactly the account of himself that permitted least my going behind it, and it was only with the effect of confirming my acceptance of it that, as I presently glanced about the room, I could say:

"Then you didn't undress at all?"

He fairly glittered in the gloom. "Not at all I sat up and read."

"And when did you go down?"

"At midnight. When I'm bad I *am* bad!"

"I see, I see—it's charming. But how could you be sure I should know it?"

"Oh, I arranged that with Flora." His answers rang out with a readiness! "She was to get up and look out."

"Which is what she did do." It was I who fell into the trap!

"So she disturbed you, and, to see what she was looking at, you also looked—you saw."

"While you," I concurred, "caught your death in the night air!"

He literally bloomed so from this exploit that he could afford radiantly to assent. "How otherwise should I have been bad enough?" he asked. Then, after another embrace, the incident and our interview closed on my recognition of all the reserves of goodness that, for his joke, he had been able to draw upon.

12

THE particular impression I had received proved in the morning light, I repeat, not quite successfully presentable to Mrs. Grose, though I re-enforced it with the mention of still another remark that he had made before we separated. "It all lies in half a dozen words," I said to her, "words that really settle the matter. 'Think, you know, what I *might* do!' He threw that off to show me how good he is. He knows down to the ground what he "might do." That's what he gave them a taste of at school."

"Lord, you do change!" cried my friend.

"I don't change—I simply make it out. The four, depend upon it, perpetually meet. If on either of these last nights you had been with either child you'd clearly have understood. The more I've watched and waited the more I've felt that if there were nothing else to make it sure it would be made so by the systematic silence of each. *Never*, by a slip of the tongue, have they so much as alluded to either of their old friends, any more than Miles has alluded to his expulsion. Oh, yes, we may sit here and look at them, and they may show off to us there to their fill; but even while they pretend to be lost in their fairy-tale they're steeped in their vision of the dead restored to them. He's not reading to her," I declared; "they're talking of *them*—they're talking horrors! I go on, I know, as if I were crazy; and it's a wonder I'm not. What I've seen would have made *you* so; but it has only made me more lucid, made me get hold of still other things."

My lucidity must have seemed awful, but the charming creatures who were victims of it, passing and repassing in their interlocked sweetness, gave my colleague something to hold on by; and I felt how tight she held as, without stirring in the breath of my passion, she covered them still with her eyes. "Of what other things have you got hold?"

"Why, of the very things that have delighted, fascinated and yet, at bottom, as I now so strangely see, mystified and troubled

me. Their more than earthly beauty, their absolutely unnatural goodness. It's a game," I went on ; " it's a policy and a fraud ! "

" On the part of little darlings— ? "

" As yet mere lovely babies ? Yes, mad as that seems ! The very act of bringing it out really helped me to trace it—follow it all up and piece it all together. They haven't been good—they've only been absent. It has been easy to live with them because they're simply leading a life of their own. They're not mine—they're not ours. They're his and they're hers ! "

" Quint's and that woman's ? "

" Quint's and that woman's. They want to get to them. "

Oh, how, at this, poor Mrs. Grose appeared to study them !

" But for what ? "

" For the love of all the evil that, in those dreadful days, the pair put into them. And to ply them with that evil still, to keep up the work of demons, is what brings the others back. "

" Laws ! " said my friend under her breath. The exclamation was homely, but it revealed a real acceptance of my further proof of what, in the bad time—for there had been a worse even than this !—must have occurred. There could have been no such justification for me as the plain assent of her experience to whatever depth of depravity I found credible in our brace of scoundrels. It was in obvious submission of memory that she brought out after a moment : " They *were* rascals ! But what can they now do ? " she pursued.

" Do ? " I echoed so loud that Miles and Flora, as they passed at their distance, paused an instant in their walk and looked at us. " Don't they do enough ? " I demanded in a lower tone, while the children, having smiled and nodded and kissed hands to us, resumed their exhibition. We were held by it a minute ; then I answered : " They can destroy them ! " At this my companion did turn, but the appeal she launched was a silent one, the effect of which was to make me more explicit. " They don't know as yet quite how—but they're trying hard. They're seen only across, as it were, and beyond—in strange places and on high places, the top of towers, the roof of houses, the outside of windows, the further edge of pools ; but there's a deep design on either side, to shorten the distance and overcome the obstacle : so the success of the tempters is only a question of time. They've only to keep to their suggestions of danger. "

" For the children to come ? "

" And perish in the attempt ! " Mrs. Grose slowly got up, and I scrupulously added : " Unless, of course, we can prevent ! "

Standing there before me while I kept my seat, she visibly

turned things over. "Their uncle must do the preventing. He must take them away."

"And who's to make him?"

She had been scanning the distance, but she now dropped on me a foolish face. "You, miss."

"By writing to him that his house is poisoned and his nephew and niece mad?"

"But if they *are*, miss?"

"And if I am myself, you mean? That's charming news to be sent him by a person enjoying his confidence and whose prime undertaking was to give him no worry."

Mrs. Grose considered, following the children again. "Yes, he *do* hate worry. That was the great reason—"

"Why those fiends took him in so long? No doubt, though his indifference must have been awful. As I'm not a fiend, at any rate, I shouldn't take him in."

My companion, after an instant and for all answer, sat down again and grasped my arm. "Make him at any rate come to you."

I stared. "To *me*?" I had a sudden fear of what she might do. "'Him?'"

"He ought to *be* here—he ought to help."

I quickly rose and I think I must have shown her a queerer face than ever yet. "You see me asking him for a visit?" No, with her eyes on my face she evidently couldn't. Instead of it even—as a woman reads another—she could see what I myself saw: his derision, his amusement, his contempt for the breakdown of my resignation at being left alone and for the fine machinery I had set in motion to attract his attention to my slighted charms. She didn't know—no one knew—how proud I had been to serve him and to stick to our terms; yet she none the less took the measure, I think, of the warning I now gave her.

"If you should so lose your head as to appeal to him for me—"

She was really frightened. "Yes, miss?"

"I would leave, on the spot, both him and you."

It was all very well to join them, but speaking to them proved quite as much as ever an effort beyond my strength—offered, in close quarters, difficulties as insurmountable as before. This situation continued a month, and with new aggravations and particular notes, the note above all, sharper and sharper, of the

small ironic consciousness on the part of my pupils. It was not, I am as sure to-day as I was sure then, my mere infernal imagination : it was absolutely traceable that they were aware of my predicament and that this strange relation made, in a manner, for a long time, the air in which we moved. I don't mean that they had their tongues in their cheeks or did anything vulgar, for that was not one of their dangers : I do mean, on the other hand, that the element of the unnamed and untouched became, between us, greater than any other, and that so much avoidance couldn't have been made successful without a great deal of tacit arrangement. It was as if, at moments, we were perpetually coming into sight of subjects before which we must stop short, turning suddenly out of alleys that we perceived to be blind, closing with a little bang that made us look at each other—for, like all bangs, it was something louder than we had intended—the doors we had indiscreetly opened. All roads lead to Rome, and there were times when it might have struck us that almost every branch of study or subject of conversation skirted forbidden ground. Forbidden ground was the question of the return of the dead in general and of whatever, in especial, might survive, for memory, of the friends little children had lost. There were days when I could have sworn that one of them had, with a small invisible nudge, said to the other : "She thinks she'll do it this time—but she *won't!*" To "do it" would have been to indulge, for instance—and for once in a way—in some direct reference to the lady who had prepared them for my discipline. They had a delightful endless appetite for passages in my own history to which I had again and again treated them ; they were in possession of everything that had ever happened to me, had had, with every circumstance, the story of my smallest adventures and of those of my brothers and sisters and of the cat and the dog at home, as well as many particulars of the whimsical bent of my father, of the furniture and arrangement of our house and of the conversation of the old women of our village. There were things enough, taking one with another, to chatter about, if one went very fast and knew by instinct when to go round. They pulled with an art of their own the strings of my invention and my memory ; and nothing else perhaps, when I thought of such occasions afterwards, gave me so the suspicion of being watched from under cover. It was in any case over *my* life, *my* past and *my* friends alone that we could take anything like our ease ; a state of affairs that led them sometimes without the least pertinence to break out into sociable reminders. I was invited—with no visible connection—to repeat afresh Goody Gosling's celebrated *mot* or

to confirm the details already supplied as to the cleverness of the vicarage pony.

It was partly at such junctures as these and partly at quite different ones that, with the turn my matters had now taken, my predicament, as I have called it, grew most sensible. The fact that the days passed for me without another encounter ought, it would have appeared, to have done something toward soothing my nerves. Since the light brush, that second night on the upper landing, of the presence of a woman at the foot of the stair, I had seen nothing, whether in or out of the house, that one had better not have seen. There was many a corner round which I expected to come upon Quint, and many a situation that, in a merely sinister way, would have favoured the appearance of Miss Jessel. The summer had turned, the summer had gone ; the autumn had dropped upon Bly and had blown out half our lights. The place, with its grey sky and withered garlands, its bared spaces and scattered dead leaves, was like a theatre after the performance—all strewn with crumpled playbills. There were exactly states of the air, conditions of sound and of stillness, unspeakable impressions of the *kind* of ministering moment, that brought back to me, long enough to catch it, the feeling of the medium in which, that June evening out of doors, I had had my first sight of Quint, and in which too, at those other instants, I had, after seeing him through the window, looked for him in vain in the circle of shrubbery. I recognised the signs, the portents—I recognised the moment, the spot. But they remained unaccompanied and empty, and I continued unmolested ; if unmolested one could call a young woman whose sensibility had, in the most extraordinary fashion, not declined but deepened. I had said in my talk with Mrs. Grose on that horrid scene of Flora's by the lake—and had perplexed her by so saying—that it would from that moment distress me much more to lose my power than to keep it. I had then expressed what was vividly in my mind : the truth that, whether the children really saw or not—since, that is, it was not yet definitely proved—I greatly preferred, as a safeguard, the fullness of my own exposure. I was ready to know the very worst that was to be known. What I had then had an ugly glimpse of was that my eyes might be sealed just while theirs were most opened. Well, my eyes *were* sealed, it appeared, at present—a consummation for which it seemed blasphemous not to thank God. There was, alas, a difficulty about that : I would have thanked Him with all my soul had I not had in a proportionate measure this conviction of the secret of my pupils.

How can I retrace to-day the strange steps of my obsession? There were times of our being together when I would have been ready to swear that, literally, in my presence, but with my direct sense of it closed, they had visitors who were known and were welcome. Then it was that, had I not been deterred by the very chance that such an injury might prove greater than the injury to be averted, my exaltation would have broken out. "They're here, they're here, you little wretches," I would have cried, "and you can't deny it now!" The little wretches denied it with all the added volume of their sociability and their tenderness, just in the crystal depths of which—like the flash of a fish in a stream—the mockery of their advantage peeped up. The shock had in truth sunk into me still deeper than I knew on the night when, looking out either for Quint or for Miss Jessel under the stars, I had seen there the boy over whose rest I watched and who had immediately brought in with him—had straightway there turned on me—the lovely upward look with which, from the battlements above us, the hideous apparition of Quint had played. If it was a question of a scare my discovery on this occasion had scared me more than any other, and it was essentially in the scared state that I drew my actual conclusions. They harassed me so that sometimes, at odd moments, I shut myself up audibly to rehearse—it was at once a fantastic relief and a renewed despair—the manner in which I might come to the point. I approached it from one side and the other while, in my room, I flung myself about, but I always broke down in the monstrous utterances of names. As they died away on my lips I said to myself that I should indeed help them to represent something infamous if by pronouncing them I should violate as rare a little case of instinctive delicacy as any schoolroom probably had ever known. When I said to myself: "*They* have the manners to be silent, and you, trusted as you are, the baseness to speak!" I felt myself crimson and covered my face with my hands. After these secret scenes I chattered more than ever, going on volubly enough till one of our prodigious, palpable hushes occurred—I can call them nothing else—the strange, dizzy lift or swim (I try for terms!) into a stillness, a pause of all life, that had nothing to do with the more or less noise we at the moment might be engaged in making and that I could hear through any intensified mirth or quickened recitation or louder strum of the piano. Then it was that the others, the outsiders, were there. Though they were not angels they "*passed*," as the French say, causing me, while they stayed, to tremble with the fear of their addressing to their younger victims some yet more infernal message or

more vivid image than they had thought good enough for myself.

What it was least possible to get rid of was the cruel idea that, whatever I had seen, Miles and Flora saw *more*—things terrible and unguessable and that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past. Such things naturally left on the surface, for the time, a chill that we vociferously denied we felt ; and we had all three, with repetition, got into such splendid training that we went, each time, to mark the close of the incident, almost automatically through the very same movements. It was striking of the children at all events to kiss me inveterately with a wild irrelevance and never to fail—one or the other—of the precious question that had helped us through many a peril. “When do you think he *will* come ? Don’t you think we *ought* to write ? ”—there was nothing like that inquiry, we found by experience, for carrying off an awkwardness. “He,” of course, was their uncle in Harley Street ; and we lived in much profusion of theory that he might at any moment arrive to mingle in our circle. It was impossible to have given less encouragement than he had administered to such a doctrine, but if we had not had the doctrine to fall back upon we should have deprived each other of some of our finest exhibitions. He never wrote to them—that may have been selfish, but it was a part of the flattery of his trust of myself ; for the way in which a man pays his highest tribute to a woman is apt to be but by the more festal celebration of one of the sacred laws of his comfort. So I held that I carried out the spirit of the pledge given not to appeal to him when I let our young friends understand that their own letters were but charming literary exercises. They were too beautiful to be posted ; I kept them myself ; I have them all to this hour. This was a rule, indeed, which only added to the satiric effect of my being plied with the supposition that he might at any moment be among us. It was exactly as if our young friends knew how almost more awkward than anything else that might be for me. There appears to me, moreover, as I look back no note in all this more extraordinary than the mere fact that, in spite of my tension and of their triumph, I never lost patience with them. Adorable they must in truth have been, I now feel, since I didn’t in these days hate them ! Would exasperation, however, if relief had longer been postponed, finally have betrayed me ? It little matters, for relief arrived. I call it relief though it was only the relief that a snap brings to a strain or the burst of a thunderstorm to a day of suffocation. It was at least change, and it came with a rush.

WALKING to church a certain Sunday morning, I had little Miles at my side and his sister, in advance of us and at Mrs. Grose's, well in sight. It was a crisp, clear day, the first of its order for some time ; the night had brought a touch of frost and the autumn air, bright and sharp, made the church bells almost gay. It was an odd accident of thought that I should have happened at such a moment to be particularly and very gratefully struck with the obedience of my little charges. Why did they never resent my inexorable, my perpetual society ? Something or other had brought nearer home to me that I had all but pinned the boy to my shawl, and that in the way our companions were marshalled before me I might have appeared to provide against some danger of rebellion. I was like a jailer with an eye to possible surprises and escapes. But all this belonged—I mean their magnificent little surrender—just to the special array of the facts that were most abysmal. Turned out for Sunday by his uncle's tailor, who had had a free hand and a notion of pretty waistcoats and of his grand little air, Miles's whole title to independence, the rights of his sex and situation, were so stamped upon him that if he had suddenly struck for freedom I should have had nothing to say. I was by the strangest of chances wondering how I should meet him when the revolution unmistakably occurred. I call it a revolution because I now see how, with the word he spoke, the curtain rose on the last act of my dreadful drama and the catastrophe was precipitated. "Look here, my dear, you know," he charmingly said, "when in the world, please, am I going back to school ?"

Transcribed here the speech sounds harmless enough, particularly as uttered in the sweet, high, casual pipe with which, at all interlocutors, but above all at his eternal governess, he threw off intonations as if he were tossing roses. There was something in them that always made one "catch," and I caught at any rate now so effectually that I stopped as short as if one of the trees of the park had fallen across the road. There was something new, on the spot, between us, and he was perfectly aware I recognised it, though to enable me to do so he had no need to look a whit less candid and charming than usual. I could feel in him how he already, from my at first finding nothing to reply, perceived the advantage he had gained. I was so slow to find anything that he had plenty of time, after a minute, to continue with his suggestive but inconclusive smile : "You know, my dear, that for

a fellow to be with a lady *always*—!" His "my dear" was constantly on his lips for me, and nothing could have expressed more the exact shade of the sentiment with which I desired to inspire my pupils than its fond familiarity. It was so respectfully easy.

But oh, how I felt that at present I must pick my own phrases! I remember that, to gain time, I tried to laugh, and I seemed to see in the beautiful face with which he watched me how ugly and queer I looked. "And always with the same lady?" I returned.

He neither blenched nor winked. The whole thing was virtually out between us. "Ah, of course she's a jolly 'perfect' lady; but after all I'm a fellow, don't you see? who's—well, getting on."

I lingered there with him an instant ever so kindly. "Yes, you're getting on." Oh, but I felt helpless!

I have kept to this day the heartbreaking little idea of how he seemed to know that and to play with it. "And you can't say I've not been awfully good, can you?"

I laid my hand on his shoulder, for though I felt how much better it would have been to walk on, I was not yet quite able. "No, I can't say that, Miles."

"Except just that one might, you know—!"

"That one night?" I couldn't look as straight as he.

"Why, when I went down—went out of the house."

"Oh, yes. But I forget what you did it for."

"You forget?"—he spoke with the sweet extravagance of childish reproach. "Why, it was just to show you I could!"

"Oh, yes—you could."

"And I can again."

I felt I might perhaps after all succeed in keeping my wits about me. "Certainly. But you won't."

"No, not *that* again. It was nothing."

"It was nothing," I said. "But we must go on."

He resumed our walk with me, passing his hand into my arm. "Then when *am* I going back?"

I wore, in turning it over, my most responsible air. "Were you very happy at school?"

He just considered. "Oh, I'm happy enough anywhere!"

"Well, then," I quavered, "if you're just as happy here—!"

"Ah, but that isn't everything! Of course *you* know a lot—"

"But you hint that you know almost as much?" I risked as he paused.

"Not half I want to!" Miles honestly professed. "But it isn't so much that."

"What is it, then?"

"Well—I want to see more life."

"I see; I see." We had arrived within sight of the church and of various persons, including several of the household of Bly, on their way to it and clustered about the door to see us go in. I quickened our step; I wanted to get there before the question between us opened up much further; I reflected hungrily that he would have for more than an hour to be silent; and I thought with envy of the comparative dusk of the pew and of the almost spiritual help of the hassock on which I might bend my knees. I seemed literally to be running a race with some confusion to which he was about to reduce me, but I felt he had got in first when, before we had entered the churchyard, he threw out:

"I want my own sort!"

It literally made me bound forward. "There aren't many of your own sort, Miles!" I laughed. "Unless perhaps dear little Flora!"

"You really compare me to a baby girl?"

This found me singularly weak. "Don't you then *love* our sweet Flora?"

"If I didn't—and you too; if I didn't—!" he repeated as if retreating for a jump, yet leaving his thought so unfinished that, after we had come into the gate, another stop, which he imposed on me by the pressure of his arm, had become inevitable. Mrs. Grose and Flora had passed into the church, the other worshippers had followed and we were, for the minute, alone among the old, thick graves. We had paused, on the path from the gate, by a low, oblong, table-like tomb.

"Yes, if you didn't—?"

He looked, while I waited, about at the graves. "Well, you know what!" But he didn't move, and he presently produced something that made me drop straight down on the stone slab as if suddenly to rest. "Does my uncle think what *you* think?"

I markedly rested. "How do you know what I think?"

"Ah, well, of course I don't; for it strikes me you never tell me. But I mean does *he* know?"

"Know what, Miles?"

"Why, the way I'm going on."

I recognised quickly enough that I could make, to this inquiry, no answer that wouldn't involve something of a sacrifice of my employer. Yet it struck me that we were all, at Bly, sufficiently sacrificed to make that venial. "I don't think your uncle much cares."

Miles, on this, stood looking at me. "Then don't you think he can be made to?"

"In what way?"

"Why, by his coming down."

"But who'll get him to come down?"

"I will!" the boy said with extraordinary brightness and emphasis. He gave me another look charged with that expression and then marched off alone into church.

15

THE business was practically settled from the moment I never followed him. It was a pitiful surrender to agitation, but my being aware of this had somehow no power to restore me. I only sat there on my tomb and read into what our young friend had said to me the fullness of its meaning; by the time I had grasped the whole of which I had also embraced, for absence, the pretext that I was ashamed to offer my pupils and the rest of the congregation such an example of delay. What I said to myself, above all, was that Miles had got something out of me and that the gauge of it for him would be just this awkward collapse. He had got out of me that there was something I was much afraid of, and that he should probably be able to make use of my fear to gain, for his own purpose, more freedom. My fear was of having to deal with the intolerable question of the grounds of his dismissal from school, since that was really but the question of the horrors gathered behind. That his uncle should arrive to treat with me of these things was a solution that, strictly speaking, I ought now to have desired to bring on; but I could so little face the ugliness and the pain of it that I simply procrastinated and lived from hand to mouth. The boy, to my deep discomposure, was immensely in the right, was in a position to say to me: "Either you clear up with my guardian the mystery of this interruption of my studies, or you cease to expect me to lead with you a life that's so unnatural for a boy." What was so unnatural for the particular boy I was concerned with was this sudden revelation of a consciousness and a plan.

That was what really overcame me, what prevented my going in. I walked round the church, hesitating, hovering; I reflected that I had already, with him, hurt myself beyond repair. Therefore I could patch up nothing and it was too extreme an effort to squeeze beside him into the pew; he would be so much more sure than ever to pass his arm into mine and make me sit there

for an hour in close silent contact with his commentary on our talk. For the first minute since his arrival I wanted to get away from him. As I paused beneath the high east window and listened to the sounds of worship I was taken with an impulse that might master me, I felt, and completely, should I give it the least encouragement. I might easily put an end to my ordeal by getting away altogether. Here was my chance ; there was no one to stop me ; I could give the whole thing up—turn my back and bolt. It was only a question of hurrying again, for a few preparations, to the house which the attendance at church of so many of the servants would practically have left unoccupied. No one, in short, could blame me if I should just drive desperately off. What was it to get away if I should get away only till dinner ? That would be in a couple of hours, at the end of which—I had the acute prevision—my little pupils would play at innocent wonder about my non-appearance in their train.

“What *did* you do, you naughty bad thing? Why in the world, to worry us so—and take our thoughts off too, don’t you know?—did you desert us at the very door?” I couldn’t meet such questions nor, as they asked them, their false little lovely eyes ; yet it was all so exactly what I should have to meet that, as the prospect grew sharp to me, I at last let myself go.

I got, so far as the immediate moment was concerned, away ; I came straight out of the churchyard and, thinking hard, retraced my steps through the park. It seemed to me that by the time I reached the house I had made up my mind to cynical flight. The Sunday stillness both of the approaches and of the interior, in which I met no one, fairly stirred me with a sense of opportunity. Were I to get off quickly this way I should get off without a scene, without a word. My quickness would have to be remarkable, however, and the question of a conveyance was the great one to settle. Tormented, in the hall, with difficulties and obstacles, I remember sinking down at the foot of the staircase—suddenly collapsing there on the lowest step and then, with a revulsion, recalling that it was exactly where, more than a month before, in the darkness of night and just so bowed with evil things, I had seen the spectre of the most horrible of women. At this I was able to straighten myself ; I went the rest of the way up ; I made, in my turmoil, for the schoolroom, where there were objects belonging to me that I should have to take. But I opened the door to find again, in a flash, my eyes unsealed. In the presence of what I saw I recoiled straight back upon resistance.

Seated at my own table in the clear noonday light I saw a

person whom, without my previous experience, I should have taken at the first blush for some housemaid who might have stayed at home to look after the place and who, availing herself of rare relief from observation and of the schoolroom table and my pens, ink, and paper, had applied herself to the considerable effort of a letter to her sweetheart. There was an effort in the way that, while her arms rested on the table, her hands, with evident weariness, supported her head ; but at the moment I took this in I had already become aware that, in spite of my entrance, her attitude strangely persisted. Then it was—with the very act of its announcing itself—that her identity flared up in a change of posture. She rose, not as if she had heard me, but with an indescribable grand melancholy of indifference and detachment, and, within a dozen feet of me, stood there as my vile predecessor. Dishonoured and tragic, she was all before me ; but even as I fixed and, for memory, secured it, the awful image passed away. Dark as midnight in her dark dress, her haggard beauty and her unutterable woe, she had looked at me long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers. While these instants lasted indeed I had the extraordinary chill of a feeling that it was I who was the intruder. It was as a wild protest against it that, actually addressing her—"You terrible, miserable woman !"—I heard myself break into a sound that, by the open door, rang through the long passage and the empty house. She looked at me as if she heard me, but I had recovered myself and cleared the air. There was nothing in the room the next minute but the sunshine and the sense that I must stay.

16

I HAD so perfectly expected the return of the others to be marked by a demonstration that I was freshly upset at having to find them merely dumb and discreet about my desertion. Instead of gaily denouncing and caressing me they made no allusion to my having failed them, and I was left, for the time, on perceiving that she too said nothing, to study Mrs. Grose's odd face. I did this to such purpose that I made sure they had in some way bribed her to silence ; a silence that, however, I would engage to break down on the first private opportunity. This opportunity came before tea : I secured five minutes with her in the housekeeper's room, where, in the twilight, amid a smell of lately-baked bread, but with the place all swept and garnished, I found her sitting

in pained placidity before the fire. So I see her still, so I see her best : facing the flame from her straight chair in the dusky, shining room, a large, clean picture of the "put away"—of drawers closed and locked and rest without a remedy.

"Oh, yes, they asked me to say nothing ; and to please them—so long as they were there—of course I promised. But what had happened to you ?"

"I only went with you for the walk," I said. "I had then to come back to meet a friend."

She showed her surprise. "A friend—you ?"

"Oh, yes, I've a couple !" I laughed. "But did the children give you a reason ?"

"For not alluding to your leaving us ? Yes ; they said you'd like it better. *Do* you like it better ?"

My face had made her rueful. "No, I like it worse !" But after an instant I added : "Did they say why I should like it better ?"

"No ; Master Miles only said, 'We must do nothing but what she likes' !"

"I wish indeed he would ! And what did Flora say ?"

"Miss Flora was too sweet. She said, 'Oh, of course, of course !'—and I said the same."

I thought a moment. "You were too sweet, too—I can hear you all. But none the less, between Miles and me, it's now all out."

"All out ?" My companion stared. "But what, miss ?"

"Everything. It doesn't matter. I've made up my mind. I came home, my dear," I went on, "for a talk with Miss Jessel."

I had by this time formed the habit of having Mrs. Grose literally well in hand in advance of my sounding that note ; so that even now, as she bravely blinked under the signal of my word, I could keep her comparatively firm. "A talk ! Do you mean she spoke ?"

"It came to that. I found her, on my return, in the school-room."

"And what did she say ?" I can hear the good woman still, and the candour of her stupefaction.

"That she suffers the torments— !"

It was this, of a truth, that made her, as she filled out my picture, gape. "Do you mean," she faltered "—of the lost ?"

"Of the lost. Of the damned. And that's why to share them—" I faltered myself with the horror of it.

But my companion, with less imagination, kept me up. "To share them— ?"

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

"She wants Flora." Mrs. Grose might, as I gave it to her, fairly have fallen away from me had I not been prepared. I still held her there, to show I was. "As I've told you, however, it doesn't matter."

"Because you've made up your mind? But to what?"

"To everything."

"And what do you call 'everything'?"

"Why, to sending for their uncle."

"Oh, miss, in pity do," my friend broke out.

"Ah, but I will, I *will*! I see it's the only way. What's 'out,' as I told you, with Miles is that if he thinks I'm afraid to—and has ideas of what he gains by that—he shall see he's mistaken. Yes, yes; his uncle shall have it here from me on the spot (and before the boy himself if necessary) that if I'm to be reproached with having done nothing again about more school—"

"Yes, miss—" my companion pressed me.

"Well, there's that awful reason."

There were now clearly so many of these for my poor colleague that she was excusable for being vague. "But—a—which?"

"Why, the letter from his old place."

"You'll show it to the master?"

"I ought to have done so on the instant."

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Grose with decision.

"I'll put it before him," I went on inexorably, "that I can't undertake to work the question on behalf of a child who has been expelled—"

"For we've never in the least known what!" Mrs. Grose declared.

"For wickedness. For what else—when he's so clever and beautiful and perfect? Is he stupid? Is he untidy? Is he infirm? Is he ill-natured? He's exquisite—so it can be only *that*; and that would open up the whole thing. After all," I said, "it's their uncle's fault. If he left here such people—!"

"He didn't really in the least know them. The fault's mine." She had turned quite pale.

"Well, you shan't suffer," I answered.

"The children shan't!" she emphatically returned.

I was silent awhile; we looked at each other. "Then what am I to tell him?"

"You needn't tell him anything. *I'll* tell him."

I measured this. "Do you mean you'll write—?" Remembering she couldn't, I caught myself up. "How do you communicate?"

"I tell the bailiff. *He* writes."

"And should you like him to write our story?"

My question had a sarcastic force that I had not fully intended, and it made her after a moment inconsequently break down. The tears were again in her eyes. "Ah, miss, *you* write!"

"Well—to-night," I at last returned; and on this we separated.

17

I WENT so far, in the evening, as to make a beginning. The weather had changed back, a great wind was abroad, and beneath the lamp, in my room, with Flora at peace beside me, I sat for a long time before a blank sheet of paper and listened to the lash of the rain and the batter of the gusts. Finally I went out, taking a candle; I crossed the passage and listened a minute at Miles's door. What, under my endless obsession, I had been impelled to listen for was some betrayal of his not being at rest, and I presently caught one, but not in the form I had expected. His voice tinkled out. "I say, you there—come in." It was gaiety in the gloom!

I went in with my light and found him in bed, very wide awake but very much at his ease. "Well, what are *you* up to?" he asked with a grace of sociability in which it occurred to me that Mrs. Grose, had she been present, might have looked in vain for proof that anything was "out."

I stood over him with my candle. "How did you know I was there?"

"Why, of course, I heard you. Did you fancy you made no noise? You're like a troop of cavalry!" he beautifully laughed.

"Then you weren't asleep?"

"Not much! I lie awake and think."

I had put my candle, designedly, a short way off, and then, as he held out his friendly old hand to me, had sat down on the edge of his bed. "What is it," I asked, "that you think of?"

"What in the world, my dear, but *you*?"

"Ah, the pride I take in your appreciation doesn't insist on that! I had so far rather you slept."

"Well, I think also, you know, of this queer business of ours."

I marked the coolness of his firm little hand. "Of what queer business, Miles?"

"Why, the way you bring me up. And all the rest!"

I fairly held my breath a minute, and even from my glimmering

taper there was light enough to show how he smiled up at me from his pillow. "What do you mean by all the rest?"

"Oh, you know, you know!"

I could say nothing for a minute, though I felt as I held his hand and our eyes continued to meet that my silence had all the air of admitting his charge and that nothing in the whole world of reality was perhaps at that moment so fabulous as our actual relation. "Certainly you shall go back to school," I said, "if it be that that troubles you. But not to the old place—we must find another, a better. How could I know it did trouble you, this question, when you never told me so, never spoke of it at all?" His clear listening face, framed in its smooth whiteness, made him for the minute as appealing as some wistful patient in a children's hospital; and I would have given, as the resemblance came to me, all I possessed on earth really to be the nurse or the sister of charity who might have helped to cure him. Well, even as it was I perhaps might help! "Do you know you've never said a word to me about your school—I mean the old one; never mentioned it in any way?"

He seemed to wonder; he smiled with the same loveliness. But he clearly gained time; he waited, he called for guidance. "Haven't I?" It wasn't for *me* to help him—it was for the thing I had met!

Something in his tone and the expression of his face, as I got this from him, set my heart aching with such a pang as it had never yet known; so unutterably touching was it to see his little brain puzzled and his little resources taxed to play, under the spell laid on him, a part of innocence and consistency. "No, never—from the hour you came back. You've never mentioned to me one of your masters, one of your comrades, nor the least little thing that ever happened to you at school. Never, little Miles—no, never—have you given me an inkling of anything that *may* have happened there. Therefore you can fancy how much I'm in the dark. Until you came out, that way, this morning, you had since the first hour I saw you scarce even made a reference to anything in your previous life. You seemed so perfectly to accept the present." It was extraordinary how my absolute conviction of his secret precocity—or whatever I might call the poison of an influence that I dared but half-phrase—made him, in spite of the faint breath of his inward trouble, appear as accessible as an older person, forced me to treat him as an intelligent equal. "I thought you wanted to go on as you are."

It struck me that at this he just faintly coloured. He gave, at

any rate, like a convalescent slightly fatigued, a languid shake of his head. "I don't—I don't. I want to get away."

"You're tired of Bly?"

"Oh, no, I like Bly."

"Well, then—?"

"Oh, you know what a boy wants!"

I felt I didn't know so well as Miles, and I took temporary refuge. "You want to go to your uncle?"

Again, at this, with his sweet ironic face, he made a movement on the pillow. "Ah, you can't get off with that!"

I was silent a little, and it was I now, I think, who changed colour. "My dear, I don't want to get off!"

"You can't even if you do. You can't, you can't!"—he lay beautifully staring. "My uncle must come down and you must completely settle things."

"If we do," I returned with some spirit, "you may be sure it will be to take you quite away."

"Well, don't you understand that that's exactly what I'm working for? You'll have to *tell* him—about the way you've let it all drop: you'll have to tell him a tremendous lot!"

The exultation with which he uttered this helped me somehow for the instant to meet him rather more. "And how much will *you*, Miles, have to tell him? There are things he'll ask you!"

He turned it over. "Very likely. But what things?"

"The things you've never told me. To make up his mind what to do with you. He can't send you back—"

"I don't want to go back!" he broke in. "I want a new field."

He said it with admirable serenity, with positive, unimpeachable gaiety; and doubtless it was that very note that most evoked for me the poignancy, the unnatural childish tragedy, of his probable reappearance at the end of three months with all this bravado and still more dishonour. It overwhelmed me now that I should never be able to bear that, and it made me let myself go. I threw myself upon him and in the tenderness of my pity I embraced him. "Dear little Miles, dear little Miles—!"

My face was close to his, and he let me kiss him, simply taking it with indulgent good-humour. "Well, old lady?"

"Is there nothing—nothing at all that you want to tell me?"

He turned off a little, facing round toward the wall and holding up his hand to look at as one had seen sick children look. "I've told you—I told you this morning."

Oh, I was sorry for him ! " That you just want me not to worry you ? "

He looked round at me now as if in recognition of my understanding him ; then ever so gently, " To let me alone," he replied.

There was even a strange little dignity in it, something that made me release him, yet, when I had slowly risen, linger beside him. God knows *I* never wished to harass him, but I felt that merely, at this, to turn my back on him was to abandon or, to put it more truly, to lose him. " I've just begun a letter to your uncle," I said.

" Well, then, finish it ! "

I waited a minute. " What happened before ? "

He gazed up at me again. " Before what ? "

" Before you came back. And before you went away."

For some time he was silent, but he continued to meet my eyes. " What happened ? "

It made me, the sound of the words, in which it seemed to me I caught for the very first time a small faint quaver of consenting consciousness—it made me drop to my knees beside the bed and seize once more the chance of possessing him. " Dear little Miles, dear little Miles, if you *knew* how I want to help you ! It's only that, it's nothing but that, and I'd rather die than give you a pain or do you a wrong—I'd rather die than hurt a hair of you. Dear little Miles"—oh I brought it out now even if I *should* go too far—" I just want you to help me to save you ! " But I knew in a moment after this that I had gone too far. The answer to my appeal was instantaneous, but it came in the form of an extraordinary blast and chill, a gust of frozen air and a shake of the room as great as if, in the wild wind, the casement had crashed in. The boy gave a loud, high shriek which, lost in the rest of the shock of sound, might have seemed, indistinctly, though I was so close to him, a note either of jubilation or of terror. I jumped to my feet again and was conscious of darkness. So for a moment we remained, while I stared about me and saw the drawn curtains unstirred and the window tight. " Why, the candle's out ! " I then cried.

" It was I who blew it, dear ! " said Miles.

THE next day, after lessons, Mrs. Grose found a moment to say to me quietly : " Have you written, miss ? "

" Yes—I've written." But I didn't add—for the hour—that my letter, sealed and directed, was still in my pocket. There would be time enough to send it before the messenger should go to the village. Meanwhile there had been on the part of my pupils no more brilliant, more exemplary morning. It was exactly as if they had both had at heart to gloss over any recent little friction. They performed the dizziest feats of arithmetic, soaring quite out of *my* feeble range, and perpetrated, in higher spirits than ever, geographical and historical jokes. It was conspicuous of course in Miles in particular that he appeared to wish to show how easily he could let me down. This child, to my memory, really lives in a setting of beauty and misery that no words can translate ; there was a distinction all his own in every impulse he revealed ; never was a small natural creature, to the uninformed eye all frankness and freedom, a more ingenious, a more extraordinary little gentleman. I had perpetually to guard against the wonder of contemplation into which my initiated view betrayed me ; to check the irrelevant gaze and discouraged sigh in which I constantly both attacked and renounced the enigma of what such a little gentleman could have done that deserved a penalty. Say that, by the dark prodigy I knew, the imagination of all evil *had* been opened up to him : all the justice within me ached for the proof that it could ever have flowered into an act.

He had never at any rate been such a little gentleman as when, after our early dinner on this dreadful day, he came round to me and asked if I shouldn't like him for half an hour to play to me. David playing to Saul could never have shown a finer sense of the occasion. It was literally a charming exhibition of tact, of magnanimity, and quite tantamount to his saying outright : " The true knights we love to read about never push an advantage too far. I know what you mean now : you mean that—to be let alone yourself and not followed up—you'll cease to worry and spy upon me, won't keep me so close to you, will let me go and come. Well, I ' come,' you see—but I don't go ! There'll be plenty of time for that. I do really delight in your society and I only want to show you that I contended for a principle." It may be imagined whether I resisted this appeal or failed to accompany him again, hand in hand, to the schoolroom. He sat down at the

old piano and played as he had never played ; and if there are those who think he had better have been kicking a football I can only say that I wholly agree with them. For at the end of a time that under his influence I had quite ceased to measure I started up with a strange sense of having literally slept at my post. It was after luncheon, and by the schoolroom fire, and yet I hadn't really in the least slept ; I had only done something much worse—I had forgotten. Where all this time was Flora ? When I put the question to Miles he played on a minute before answering, and then could only say : " Why, my dear, how do I know ? " breaking moreover into a happy laugh which immediately after, as if it were a vocal accompaniment, he prolonged into incoherent, extravagant song.

I went straight to my room, but his sister was not there ; then, before going downstairs, I looked into several others. As she was nowhere about she would surely be with Mrs. Grose, whom in the comfort of that theory I accordingly proceeded in quest of. I found her where I had found her the evening before, but she met my quick challenge with blank scared ignorance. She had only supposed that, after the repast, I had carried off both the children ; as to which she was quite in her right, for it was the very first time I had allowed the little girl out of my sight without some special provision. Of course now indeed she might be with the maids, so that the immediate thing was to look for her without an air of alarm. This we promptly arranged between us ; but when, ten minutes later and in pursuance of our arrangement, we met in the hall, it was only to report on either side that after guarded inquiries we had altogether failed to trace her. For a minute there, apart from observation, we exchanged mute alarms, and I could feel with what high interest my friend returned me all those I had from the first given her.

" She'll be above," she presently said—" in one of the rooms you haven't searched."

" No ; she's at a distance." I had made up my mind. " She has gone out."

Mrs. Grose stared. " Without a hat ! "

I naturally also looked volumes. " Isn't that woman always without one ? "

" She's with *her* ? "

" She's with *her* ! " I declared. " We must find them."

My hand was on my friend's arm, but she failed for the moment, confronted with such an account of the matter, to respond to my pressure. She communed on the contrary, where she stood, with her uneasiness. " And where's Master Miles ? "

"Oh, *he's* with Quint. They'll be in the schoolroom."

"Lord, miss!" My view, I was myself aware—and therefore I suppose my tone—had never yet reached so calm an assurance.

"The trick's played," I went on; "they've successfully worked their plan. He found the most divine little way to keep me quiet while she went off."

"'Divine'?" Mrs. Grose bewilderedly echoed.

"Infernal, then!" I almost cheerfully rejoined. "He has provided for himself as well. But come!"

She had helplessly gloomed at the upper regions. "You leave him—?"

"So long with Quint? Yes—I don't mind that now."

She always ended at these moments by getting possession of my hand, and in this manner she could at present still stay me. But after gasping an instant at my sudden resignation, "Because of your letter?" she eagerly brought out.

I quickly, by way of answer, felt for my letter, drew it forth, held it up, and then, freeing myself, went and laid it on the great hall-table. "Luke will take it," I said as I came back. I reached the house-door and opened it; I was already on the steps.

My companion still demurred: the storm of the night and the early morning had dropped, but the afternoon was damp and grey. I came down to the drive while she stood in the doorway. "You go with nothing on?"

"What do I care when the child has nothing? I can't wait to dress," I cried, "and if you must do so I leave you. Try meanwhile yourself upstairs."

"With *them*?" Oh, on this the poor woman promptly joined me!

19

WE went straight to the lake, as it was called at Bly, and I dare say rightly called, though it may have been a sheet of water less remarkable than my untravelled eyes supposed it. My acquaintance with sheets of water was small, and the pool of Bly, at all events on the few occasions of my consenting, under the protection of my pupils, to affront its surface in the old flat-bottomed boat moored there for our use, had impressed me both with its extent and its agitation. The usual place of embarkation was half a mile from the house, but I had an intimate conviction that, wherever Flora might be, she was not near home. She had not

given me the slip for any small adventure, and, since the day of the very great one that I had shared with her by the pond, I had been aware, in our walks, of the quarter to which she most inclined. This was why I had now given to Mrs. Grose's steps so marked a direction—a direction making her, when she perceived it, oppose a resistance that showed me she was freshly mystified. "You're going to the water, miss?—you think she's in—?"

"She may be, though the depth is, I believe, nowhere very great. But what I judge most likely is that she's on the spot from which, the other day, we saw together what I told you."

"When she pretended not to see—?"

"With that astounding self-possession! I've always been sure she wanted to go back alone. And now her brother has managed it for her."

Mrs. Grose still stood where she had stopped. "You suppose they really *talk* of them?"

I could meet this with an assurance! "They say things that, if we heard them, would simply appal us."

"And if she is there—?"

"Yes?"

"Then Miss Jessel is?"

"Beyond a doubt. You shall see."

"Oh, thank you!" my friend cried, planted so firm that, taking it in, I went straight on without her. By the time I reached the pool, however, she was close behind me, and I knew that, whatever, to her apprehension, might befall me, the exposure of sticking to me struck her as her least danger. She exhaled a moan of relief as we at last came in sight of the greater part of the water without a sight of the child. There was no trace of Flora on that nearer side of the bank where my observation of her had been most startling, and none on the opposite edge, where, save for a margin of some twenty yards, a thick copse came down to the water. This expanse, oblong in shape, was so narrow compared to its length that, with its ends out of view, it might have been taken for a scant river. We looked at the empty stretch, and then I felt the suggestion in my friend's eyes. I knew what she meant and I replied with a negative head-shake.

"No, no; wait! She has taken the boat."

My companion stared at the vacant mooring-place and then again across the lake. "Then where is it?"

"Our not seeing it is the strongest of proofs. She has used it to go over, and then has managed to hide it."

"All alone—that child?"

"She's not alone, and at such times she's not a child: she's an old, old woman." I scanned all the visible shore while Mrs. Grose took again, into the queer element I offered her, one of her plunges of submission; then I pointed out that the boat might perfectly be in a small refuge formed by one of the recesses of the pool, an indentation masked, for the hither side, by a projection of the bank and by a clump of trees growing close to the water.

"But if the boat's there, where on earth's *she*?" my colleague anxiously asked.

"That's exactly what we must learn." And I started to walk further.

"By going all the way round?"

"Certainly, far as it is. It will take us but ten minutes, yet it's far enough to have made the child prefer not to walk. She went straight over."

"Laws!" cried my friend again; the chain of my logic was ever too strong for her. It dragged her at my heels even now, and when we had got half-way round—a devious tiresome process, on ground much broken and by a path choked with overgrowth—I paused to give her breath. I sustained her with a grateful arm, assuring her that she might hugely help me; and this started us afresh, so that in the course of but few minutes more we reached a point from which we found the boat to be where I had supposed it. It had been intentionally left as much as possible out of sight and was tied to one of the stakes of a fence that came, just there, down to the brink and that had been an assistance to disembarking. I recognised, as I looked at the pair of short, thick oars, quite safely drawn up, the prodigious character of the feat for a little girl; but I had by this time lived too long among wonders and had panted to too many livelier measures. There was a gate in the fence, through which we passed, and that brought us after a trifling interval more into the open. Then "There she is!" we both exclaimed at once.

Flora, a short way off, stood before us on the grass and smiled as if her performance had now become complete. The next thing she did, however, was to stoop straight down and pluck—quite as if it were all she was there for—a big, ugly spray of withered fern. I at once felt sure she had just come out of the copse. She waited for us, not herself taking a step, and I was conscious of the rare solemnity with which we presently approached her. She smiled and smiled, and we met; but it was all done in a silence by this time flagrantly ominous. Mrs. Grose was the first to

break the spell : she threw herself on her knees and, drawing the child to her breast, clasped in a long embrace the little, tender, yielding body. While this dumb convulsion lasted I could only watch it—which I did the more intently when I saw Flora's face peep at me over our companion's shoulder. It was serious now—the flicker had left it ; but it strengthened the pang with which I at that moment envied Mrs. Grose the simplicity of *her* relation. Still, all this while, nothing more passed between us save that Flora had let her foolish fern again drop to the ground. What she and I had virtually said to each other was that pretexts were useless now. When Mrs. Grose finally got up she kept the child's hand, so that the two were still before me ; and the singular reticence of our communion was even more marked in the frank look she addressed me. " I'll be hanged," it said, " if I'll speak ! "

It was Flora who, gazing all over me in candid wonder, was the first. She was struck with our bare-headed aspect. " Why, where are your things ? "

" Where yours are, my dear ! " I promptly returned.

She had already got back her gaiety and appeared to take this as an answer quite sufficient. " And where's Miles ? " she went on.

There was something in the small valour of it that quite finished me : these three words from her were in a flash like the glitter of a drawn blade, the jostle of the cup that my hand for weeks and weeks had held high and full to the brim and that now, even before speaking, I felt overflow in a deluge. " I'll tell you if you'll tell *me*—" I heard myself say, then heard the tremor in which it broke.

" Well, what ? "

Mrs. Grose's suspense blazed at me, but it was too late now, and I brought the thing out handsomely. " Where, my pet, is Miss Jessel ? "

Just as in the churchyard with Miles, the whole thing was upon us. Much as I had made of the fact that this name had never once, between us, been sounded, the quick smitten glare with which the child's face now received it fairly likened my breach of the silence to the smash of a pane of glass. It added to the interposing cry, as if to stay the blow, that Mrs. Grose at the same instant uttered over my violence—the shriek of a creature scared,

or rather wounded, which, in turn, within a few seconds, was completed by a gasp of my own. I seized my colleague's arm. "She's there, she's there!"

Miss Jessel stood before us on the opposite bank exactly as she had stood the other time, and I remember, strangely, as the first feeling now produced in me, my thrill of joy at having brought on a proof. She was there, so I was justified; she was there, so I was neither cruel nor mad. She was there for poor scared Mrs. Grose, but she was there most for Flora; and no moment of my monstrous time was perhaps so extraordinary as that in which I consciously threw out to her—with the sense that, pale and ravenous demon as she was, she would catch and understand it—an inarticulate message of gratitude. She rose erect on the spot my friend and I had lately quitted, and there wasn't in all the long reach of her desire an inch of her evil that fell short. This first vividness of vision and emotion were things of a few seconds, during which Mrs. Grose's dazed blink across to where I pointed struck me as showing that she too at last saw, just as it carried my own eyes precipitately to the child. The revelation then of the manner in which Flora was affected startled me in truth far more than it would have done to find her also merely agitated, for direct dismay was of course not what I had expected. Prepared and on her guard as our pursuit had actually made her, she would repress every betrayal; and I was therefore at once shaken by my first glimpse of the particular one for which I had not allowed. To see her, without a convulsion of her small pink face, not even feign to glance in the direction of the prodigy I announced, but only, instead of that, turn at *me* an expression of hard, still gravity, an expression absolutely new and unprecedented and that appeared to read and accuse and judge me—this was a stroke that somehow converted the little girl herself into a figure portentous. I gaped at her coolness even though my certitude of her thoroughly seeing was never greater than at that instant, and then, in the immediate need to defend myself, I called her passionately to witness. "She's there, you little unhappy thing—there, there, *there*, and you know it as well as you know me!" I had said shortly before to Mrs. Grose that she was not at these times a child, but an old, old woman, and my description of her couldn't have been more strikingly confirmed than in the way in which, for all notice of this, she simply showed me, without an expressional concession or admission, a countenance of deeper and deeper, of indeed suddenly quite fixed reprobation. I was by this time—if I can put the whole thing at all together—more appalled at what I may properly call her manner than at any-

thing else, though it was quite simultaneously that I became aware of having Mrs. Grose also, and very formidably, to reckon with. My elder companion, the next moment, at any rate, blotted out everything but her own flushed face and her loud shocked protest, a burst of high disapproval. "What a dreadful turn, to be sure, miss! Where on earth do you see anything?"

I could only grasp her more quickly yet, for even while she spoke the hideous plain presence stood undimmed and undaunted. It had already lasted a minute, and it lasted while I continued, seizing my colleague, quite thrusting her at it and presenting her to it, to insist with my pointing hand. "You don't see her exactly as *we* see?—you mean to say you don't now—*now*? She's as big as a blazing fire! Only look, dearest woman, *look*—!" She looked, just as I did, and gave me, with her deep groan of negation, repulsion, compassion—the mixture with her pity of her relief at her exemption—a sense, touching to me even then, that she would have backed me up if she had been able. I might well have needed that, for with this hard blow of the proof that her eyes were hopelessly sealed I felt my own situation horribly crumble, I felt—I *saw*—my livid predecessor press, from her position, on my defeat, and I took the measure, more than all, of what I should have from this instant to deal with in the astounding little attitude of Flora. Into this attitude Mrs. Grose immediately and violently entered, breaking, even while there pierced through my sense of ruin a prodigious private triumph, into breathless reassurance.

"She isn't there, little lady, and nobody's there—and you never see nothing, my sweet! How can poor Miss Jessel—when poor Miss Jessel's dead and buried? *We* know, don't we, love?"—and she appealed, blundering in, to the child. "It's all a mere mistake and a worry and a joke—and we'll go home as fast as we can!"

Our companion, on this, had responded with a strange quick primness of propriety, and they were again, with Mrs. Grose on her feet, united, as it were, in shocked opposition to me. Flora continued to fix me with her small mask of disaffection, and even at that minute I prayed God to forgive me for seeming to see that, as she stood there holding tight to our friend's dress, her incomparable childish beauty had suddenly failed, had quite vanished. I've said it already—she was literally, she was hideously hard; she had turned common and almost ugly. "I don't know what you mean. I see nobody. I see nothing. I never *have*. I think you're cruel. I don't like you!" Then, after this

deliverance, which might have been that of a vulgarly pert little girl in the street, she hugged Mrs. Grose more closely and buried in her skirts the dreadful little face. In this position she launched an almost furious wail. "Take me away, take me away—oh, take me away from *her*!"

"From *me*?" I panted.

"From you—from you!" she cried.

Even Mrs. Grose looked across at me dismayed, while I had nothing to do but communicate again with the figure that, on the opposite bank, without a movement, as rigidly still as if catching, beyond the interval, our voices, was as vividly there for my disaster as it was not there for my service. The wretched child had spoken exactly as if she had got from some outside source each of her stabbing little words, and I could therefore, in the full despair of all I had to accept, but sadly shake my head at her. "If I had ever doubted all my doubt would at present have gone. I've been living with the miserable truth, and now it has only too much closed round me. Of course I've lost you: I've interfered, and you've seen, under *her* dictation"—with which I faced, over the pool again, our infernal witness—"the easy and perfect way to meet it. I've done my best, but I've lost you. Good-bye." For Mrs. Grose I had an imperative, an almost frantic "Go, go!" before which, in infinite distress, but mutely possessed of the little girl and clearly convinced, in spite of her blindness, that something awful had occurred and some collapse engulfed us, she retreated, by the way we had come, as fast as she could move.

Of what first happened when I was left alone I had no subsequent memory. I only knew that at the end of, I suppose, a quarter of an hour, an odorous dampness and roughness, chilling and piercing my trouble, had made me understand that I must have thrown myself, on my face, to the ground and given way to a wildness of grief. I must have lain there long and cried and wailed, for when I raised my head the day was almost done. I got up and looked a moment, through the twilight, at the grey pool and its blank haunted edge, and then I took, back to the house, my dreary and difficult course. When I reached the gate in the fence the boat, to my surprise, was gone, so that I had a fresh reflexion to make on Flora's extraordinary command of the situation. She passed that night, by the most tacit and, I should add, were not the word so grotesque a false note, the happiest of arrangements, with Mrs. Grose. I saw neither of them on my return, but on the other hand I saw, as by an ambiguous compensation, a great deal of Miles. I saw—I can use no other

phrase—so much of him that it fairly measured more than it had ever measured. No evening I had passed at Bly was to have had the portentous quality of this one ; in spite of which—and in spite also of the deeper depths of consternation that had opened beneath my feet—there was literally, in the ebbing actual, an extraordinarily sweet sadness. On reaching the house I had never so much as looked for the boy ; I had simply gone straight to my room to change what I was wearing and to take in, at a glance, much material testimony to Flora's rupture. Her little belongings had all been removed. When later, by the school-room fire, I was served with tea by the usual maid, I indulged, on the article of my other pupil, in no inquiry whatever. He had his freedom now—he might have it to the end ! Well, he did have it ; and it consisted—in part at least—of his coming in at about eight o'clock and sitting down with me in silence. On the removal of the tea-things I had blown out the candles and drawn my chair closer : I was conscious of a mortal coldness and felt as if I should never again be warm. So when he appeared I was sitting in the glow with my thoughts. He paused a moment by the door as if to look at me ; then—as if to share them—came to the other side of the hearth and sank into a chair. We sat there in absolute stillness ; yet he wanted, I felt, to be with me.

21

BEFORE a new day, in my room, had fully broken, my eyes opened to Mrs. Grose, who had come to my bedside with worse news. Flora was so markedly feverish that an illness was perhaps at hand ; she had passed a night of extreme unrest, a night agitated above all by fears that had for their subject not in the least her former but wholly her present governess. It was not against the possible re-entrance of Miss Jessel on the scene that she protested—it was conspicuously and passionately against mine. I was at once on my feet, and with an immense deal to ask ; the more that my friend had discernibly now girded her loins to meet me afresh. This I felt as soon as I had put to her the question of her sense of the child's sincerity as against my own. " She persists in denying to you that she saw, or has ever seen, anything ? "

My visitor's trouble truly was great. " Ah, miss, it isn't a matter on which I can push her. Yet it isn't either, I must say, as if I much needed to. It has made her, every inch of her, quite old."

"Oh, I see her perfectly from here. She resents, for all the world like some high little personage, the imputation on her truthfulness and, as it were, her respectability. 'Miss Jessel indeed—*she*!' Ah, she's 'respectable,' the chit! The impression she gave me there yesterday was, I assure you, the very strangest of all; it was quite beyond any of the others. I *did* put my foot in it! She'll never speak to me again."

Hideous and obscure as it all was, it held Mrs. Grose briefly silent; then she granted my point with a frankness which, I made sure, had more behind it. "I think indeed, miss, she never will. She do have a grand manner about it!"

"And that manner"—I summed it up—"is practically what's the matter with her now."

Oh, that manner, I could see in my visitor's face, and not a little else besides! "She asks me every three minutes if I think you're coming in."

"I see—I see." I too, on my side, had so much more than worked it out. "Has she said to you since yesterday—except to repudiate her familiarity with anything so dreadful—a single other word about Miss Jessel?"

"Not one, miss. And of course, you know," my friend added, "I took it from her by the lake that just then and there at least there *was* nobody."

"Rather! And naturally you take it from her still."

"I don't contradict her. What else can I do?"

"Nothing in the world! You've the cleverest little person to deal with. They've made them—their two friends, I mean—still cleverer even than nature did; for it was wondrous material to play on! Flora has now her grievance, and she'll work it to the end."

"Yes, miss; but to *what* end?"

"Why, that of dealing with me to her uncle. She'll make me out to him the lowest creature—!"

I winced at the fair show of the scene in Mrs. Grose's face; she looked for a minute as if she sharply saw them together.

"And him who thinks so well of you!"

"He has an odd way—it comes over me now," I laughed,—"of proving it! But that doesn't matter. What Flora wants of course is to get rid of me."

My companion bravely concurred. "Never again to so much as look at you."

"So that what you've come to me now for," I asked, "is to speed me on my way?" Before she had time to reply, however, I had her in check. "I've a better idea—the result of my re-

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

flexions. My going *would* seem the right thing, and on Sunday I was terribly near it. Yet that won't do. It's *you* who must go. You must take Flora."

My visitor, at this, did speculate. "But where in the world—?"

"Away from here. Away from *them*. Away, even most of all, now, from me. Straight to her uncle."

"Only to tell on you—?"

"No, not 'only!' To leave me, in addition, with my remedy." She was still vague. "And what is your remedy?"

"Your loyalty, to begin with. And then Miles's."

She looked at me hard. "Do you think he—?"

"Won't, if he has the chance, turn on me? Yes, I venture still to think it. At all events I want to try. Get off with his sister as soon as possible and leave me with him alone." I was amazed, myself, at the spirit I had still in reserve, and therefore perhaps a trifle the more disconcerted at the way in which, in spite of this fine example of it, she hesitated. "There's one thing, of course," I went on: "they mustn't, before she goes, see each other for three seconds." Then it came over me that, in spite of Flora's presumable sequestration from the instant of her return from the pool, it might already be too late. "Do you mean," I anxiously asked, "that they *have* met?"

At this she quite flushed. "Ah, miss, I'm not such a fool as that! If I've been obliged to leave her three or four times, it has been each time with one of the maids, and at present, though she's alone, she's locked in safe. And yet—and yet!" There were too many things.

"And yet what?"

"Well, are you so sure of the little gentleman?"

"I'm not sure of anything but *you*. But I have, since last evening, a new hope. I think he wants to give me an opening. I do believe that—poor little exquisite wretch!—he wants to speak. Last evening, in the firelight and the silence, he sat with me for two hours as if it were just coming."

Mrs. Grose looked hard through the window at the grey gathering day. "And did it come?"

"No, though I waited and waited I confess it didn't, and it was without a breach of the silence, or so much as a faint allusion to his sister's condition and absence, that we at last kissed for good night. All the same," I continued, "I can't, if her uncle sees her, consent to his seeing her brother without my having given the boy—and most of all because things have got so bad—a little more time."

My friend appeared on this ground more reluctant than I could quite understand. "What do you mean by more time?"

"Well, a day or two—really to bring it out. He'll then be on *my* side—of which you see the importance. If nothing comes I shall only fail, and you at the worst have helped me by doing on your arrival in town whatever you may have found possible." So I put it before her, but she continued for a little so lost in other reasons that I came again to her aid. "Unless indeed," I wound up, "you really want *not* to go."

I could see it, in her face, at last clear itself; she put out her hand to me as a pledge. "I'll go—I'll go. I'll go this morning."

I wanted to be very just. "If you *should* wish still to wait I'd engage she shouldn't see me."

"No, no: it's the place itself. She must leave it." She held me a moment with heavy eyes, then brought out the rest. "Your idea's the right one. I myself, miss—"

"Well?"

"I can't stay."

The look she gave me with it made me jump at possibilities.

"You mean that, since yesterday you *have* seen—?"

She shook her head with dignity. "I've *heard*—!"

"Heard?"

"From the child—horrors! There!" she sighed with tragic relief. "On my honour, miss, she says things—!" But at this evocation she broke down; she dropped with a sudden cry upon my sofa and, as I had seen her do before, gave way to all the anguish of it.

It was in quite another manner that I for my part let myself go. "Oh, thank God!"

She sprang up again at this, drying her eyes with a groan.

"Thank God?"

"It so justifies me!"

"It does that, miss!"

I couldn't have desired more emphasis, but I just waited.

"She's so horrible?"

I saw my colleague scarce knew how to put it. "Really shocking."

"And about me?"

"About you, miss—since you must have it. It's beyond everything, for a young lady; and I can't think wherever she must have picked up—"

"The appalling language she applies to me? I can, then!" I broke in with a laugh that was doubtless significant enough.

It only in truth left my friend still more grave. "Well, perhaps I ought to also—since I've heard some of it before! Yet I can't bear it," the poor woman went on while with the same movement she glanced, on my dressing-table, at the face of my watch. "But I must go back."

I kept her, however. "Ah, if you can't bear it—!"

"How can I stop with her, you mean? Why, just *for* that : to get her away. Far from this," she pursued, "far from *them*—"

"She may be different? she may be free?" I seized her almost with joy. "Then in spite of yesterday you *believe*—"

"In such doings?" Her simple description of them required, in the light of her expression, to be carried no further, and she gave me the whole thing as she had never done. "I believe."

Yes, it was a joy, and we were still shoulder to shoulder : if I might continue sure of that I should care but little what else happened. My support in the presence of disaster would be the same as it had been in my early need of confidence, and if my friend would answer for my honesty I would answer for all the rest. On the point of taking leave of her, none the less, I was to some extent embarrassed. "There's one thing of course—it occurs to me—to remember. My letter, giving the alarm, will have reached town before you."

I now felt still more how she had been beating about the bush and how weary at last it had made her. "Your letter won't have got there. Your letter never went."

"What then became of it?"

"Goodness knows! Master Miles—"

"Do you mean *he* took it?" I gasped.

She hung fire, but she overcame her reluctance. "I mean that I saw yesterday, when I came back with Miss Flora, that it wasn't where you had put it. Later in the evening I had the chance to question Luke, and he declared that he had neither noticed nor touched it." We could only exchange, on this, one of our deeper mutual soundings, and it was Mrs. Grose who first brought up the plumb with an almost elate "You see!"

"Yes, I see that if Miles took it instead he probably will have read it and destroyed it."

"And don't you see anything else?"

I faced her a moment with a sad smile. "It strikes me that by this time your eyes are open even wider than mine."

They proved to be so indeed, but she could still almost blush to show it. "I make out now what he must have done at school."

And she gave, in her simple sharpness, an almost droll disillusioned nod. "He stole!"

I turned it over—I tried to be more judicial. "Well—perhaps."

She looked as if she found me unexpectedly calm. "He stole letters!"

She couldn't know my reasons for a calmness after all pretty shallow; so I showed them off as I might. "I hope then it was to more purpose than in this case! The note, at all events, that I put on the table yesterday," I pursued, "will have given him so scant an advantage—for it contained only the bare demand for an interview—that he's already much ashamed of having gone so far for so little, and that what he had on his mind last evening was precisely the need of confession." I seemed to myself for the instant to have mastered it, to see it all. "Leave us, leave us"—I was already, at the door, hurrying her off. "I'll get it out of him. He'll meet me. He'll confess. If he confesses he's saved. And if he's saved—"

"Then *you* are?" The dear woman kissed me on this, and I took her farewell. "I'll save you without him!" she cried as she went.

22

YET it was when she had got off—and I missed her on the spot—that the great pinch really came. If I had counted on what it would give me to find myself alone with Miles I quickly recognised that it would give me at least a measure. No hour of my stay in fact was so assailed with apprehensions as that of my coming down to learn that the carriage containing Mrs. Grose and my younger pupil had already rolled out of the gates. Now I *was*, I said to myself, face to face with the elements, and for much of the rest of the day, while I fought my weakness, I could consider that I had been supremely rash. It was a tighter place still than I had yet turned round in; all the more that, for the first time, I could see in the aspect of others a confused reflection of the crisis. What had happened naturally caused them all to stare; there was too little of the explained, throw out whatever we might, in the suddenness of my colleague's act. The maids and the men looked blank; the effect of which on my nerves was an aggravation until I saw the necessity of making it a positive aid. It was in short by just clutching the helm that I avoided total wreck; and I dare say that, to bear up at all, I became that morning very grand and very dry. I welcomed the consciousness that I was charged with much to do, and I caused it to be known

as well that, left thus to myself, I was quite remarkably firm. I wandered with that manner, for the next hour or two, all over the place and looked, I have no doubt, as if I were ready for any onset. So, for the benefit of whom it might concern, I paraded with a sick heart.

The person it appeared least to concern proved to be, till dinner, little Miles himself. My perambulations had given me meanwhile no glimpse of him, but they had tended to make more public the change taking place in our relation as a consequence of his having at the piano, the day before, kept me, in Flora's interest, so beguiled and befooled. The stamp of publicity had of course been fully given by her confinement and departure, and the change itself was now ushered in by our non-observance of the regular custom of the schoolroom. He had already disappeared when, on my way down, I pushed open his door, and I learned below that he had breakfasted—in the presence of a couple of the maids—with Mrs. Grose and his sister. He had then gone out, as he said, for a stroll ; than which nothing, I reflected, could better have expressed his frank view of the abrupt transformation of my office. What he would now permit this office to consist of was yet to be settled : there was at least a queer relief—I mean for myself in especial—in the renouncement of one pretension. If so much had sprung to the surface I scarce put it too strongly in saying that what had perhaps sprung highest was the absurdity of our prolonging the fiction that I had anything more to teach him. It sufficiently stuck out that, by tacit little tricks in which even more than myself he carried out the care for my dignity, I had had to appeal to him to let me off straining to meet him on the ground of his true capacity. He had at any rate his freedom now ; I was never to touch it again ; as I had amply shown, moreover, when, on his joining me in the schoolroom the previous night, I uttered, in reference to the interval just concluded, neither challenge nor hint. I had too much, from this moment, my other ideas. Yet when he at last arrived the difficulty of applying them, the accumulations of my problem, were brought straight home to me by the beautiful little presence on which what had occurred had as yet, for the eye, dropped neither stain nor shadow.

To mark, for the house, the high state I cultivated I decreed that my meals with the boy should be served, as we called it, downstairs ; so that I had been awaiting him in the ponderous pomp of the room outside the window of which I had had from Mrs. Grose, that first scared Sunday, my flash of something it

would scarce have done to call light. Here at present I felt afresh—for I had felt it again and again—how my equilibrium depended on the success of my rigid will, the will to shut my eyes as tight as possible to the truth that what I had to deal with was, revoltingly, against nature. I could only get on at all by taking “nature” into my confidence and my account, by treating my monstrous ordeal as a push in a direction unusual, of course, and unpleasant, but demanding after all, for a fair front, only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue. No attempt, none the less, could well require more tact than just this attempt to supply, oneself, *all* the nature. How could I put even a little of that article into a suppression of reference to what had occurred? How on the other hand could I make a reference without a new plunge into the hideous obscure? Well, a sort of answer, after a time, had come to me, and it was so far confirmed as that I was met, incontestably, by the quickened vision of what was rare in my little companion. It was, indeed, as if he had found even now—as he had so often found at lessons—still some other delicate way to ease me off. Wasn’t there light in the fact which, as we shared our solitude, broke out with a specious glitter it had never yet quite worn?—the fact that (opportunity aiding, precious opportunity which had now come) it would be preposterous, with a child so endowed, to forgo the help one might wrest from absolute intelligence? What had his intelligence been given him for but to save him? Mightn’t one, to reach his mind, risk the stretch of a stiff arm across his character? It was as if, when we were face to face in the dining-room, he had literally shown me the way. The roast mutton was on the table, and I had dispensed with attendance. Miles, before he sat down, stood a moment with his hands in his pockets and looked at the joint, on which he seemed on the point of passing some humorous judgement. But what he presently produced was: “I say, my dear, is she really very awfully ill?”

“Little Flora? Not so bad but that she’ll presently be better. London will set her up. Bly had ceased to agree with her. Come here and take your mutton.”

He alertly obeyed me, carried the plate carefully to his seat and, when he was established, went on. “Did Bly disagree with her so terribly all at once?”

“Not so suddenly as you might think. One had seen it coming on.”

“Then why didn’t you get her off before?”

“Before what?”

“Before she became too ill to travel.”

I found myself prompt. "She's *not* too ill to travel : she only might have become so if she had stayed. This was just the moment to seize. The journey will dissipate the influence"—oh, I was grand !—"and carry it off."

"I see, I see"—Miles, for that matter, was grand too. He settled to his repast with the charming little "table manner" that, from the day of his arrival, had relieved me of all grossness of admonition. Whatever he had been expelled from school for, it wasn't for ugly feeding. He was irreproachable, as always, to-day ; but was unmistakably more conscious. He was discernibly trying to take for granted more things than he found, without assistance, quite easy ; and he dropped into peaceful silence while he felt his situation. Our meal was of the briefest—mine a vain pretence, and I had the things immediately removed. While this was done Miles stood again with his hands in his little pockets and his back to me—stood and looked out of the side window through which, that other day, I had seen what pulled me up. We continued silent while the maid was with us—as silent, it whimsically occurred to me, as some young couple who, on their wedding-journey, at the inn, feel shy in the presence of the waiter. He turned round only when the waiter had left us. "Well—so we're alone !"

23

"Oh, more or less." I imagine my smile was pale. "Not absolutely. We shouldn't like that !" I went on.

"No—I suppose we shouldn't. Of course, we've the others."

"We've the others—we've, indeed, the others," I concurred.

"Yet even though we have them," he returned, still with his hands in his pockets and planted there in front of me, "they don't much count, do they ?"

I made the best of it, but I felt wan. "It depends on what you call 'much' !"

"Yes"—with all accommodation—"everything depends !" On this, however, he faced to the window again and presently reached it with his vague, restless, cogitating step. He remained there awhile with his forehead against the glass, in contemplation of the stupid shrubs I knew and the dull things of November. I had always my hypocrisy of "work," behind which I now gained the sofa. Steadying myself with it there as I had repeatedly done at those moments of torment that I have described as the moments of my knowing the children to be given to something from which

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

I was barred, I sufficiently obeyed my habit of being prepared for the worst. But an extraordinary impression dropped on me as I extracted a meaning from the boy's embarrassed back—none other than the impression that I was not barred now. This inference grew in a few minutes to sharp intensity and seemed bound up with the direct perception that it was positively *he* who was. The frames and squares of the great window were a kind of image, for him, of a kind of failure. I felt that I saw him, in any case, shut in or shut out. He was admirable but not comfortable : I took it in with a throb of hope. Wasn't he looking through the haunted pane for something he couldn't see?—and wasn't it the first time in the whole business that he had known such a lapse? The first, the very first : I found it a splendid portent. It made him anxious, though he watched himself ; he had been anxious all day and, even while in his usual sweet little manner he sat at table, had needed all his small strange genius to give it a gloss. When he at last turned round to meet me it was almost as if this genius had succumbed. " Well, I think I'm glad Bly agrees with me ! "

" You'd certainly seem to have seen, these twenty-four hours, a good deal more of it than for some time before. I hope," I went on bravely, " that you've been enjoying yourself."

" Oh, yes, I've been ever so far ; all round about—miles and miles away. I've never been so free."

He had really a manner of his own, and I could only try to keep up with him. " Well, do you like it ? "

He stood there smiling ; then at last he put into two words—

" Do *you* ? "—more discrimination than I had ever heard two words contain. Before I had time to deal with that, however, he continued as if with the sense that this was an impertinence to be softened. " Nothing could be more charming than the way you take it, for of course if we're alone together now it's you that are alone most. But I hope," he threw in, " you don't particularly mind ! "

" Having to do with you ? " I asked. " My dear child, how can I help minding ? Though I've renounced all claim to your company—you're so beyond me—I at least greatly enjoy it. What else should I stay on for ? "

He looked at me more directly, and the expression of his face, graver now, struck me as the most beautiful I had ever found in it. " You stay on just for *that* ? "

" Certainly. I stay on as your friend and from the tremendous interest I take in you till something can be done for you that may

be more worth your while. That needn't surprise you." My voice trembled so that I felt it impossible to suppress the shake. "Don't you remember how I told you, when I came and sat on your bed the night of the storm, that there was nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you?"

"Yes, yes!" He, on his side, more and more visibly nervous, had a tone to master; but he was so much more successful than I that, laughing out through his gravity, he could pretend we were pleasantly jesting. "Only that, I think, was to get me to do something for you!"

"It was partly to get you to do something," I conceded. "But, you know, you didn't do it."

"Oh, yes," he said with the brightest superficial eagerness, "you wanted me to tell you something."

"That's it. Out, straight out. What have you on your mind, you know."

"Ah, then is *that* what you've stayed over for?"

He spoke with a gaiety through which I could still catch the finest little quiver of resentful passion; but I can't begin to express the effect upon me of an implication of surrender even so faint. It was as if what I had yearned for had come at last only to astonish me. "Well, yes—I may as well make a clean breast of it. It was precisely for that."

He waited so long that I supposed it for the purpose of repudiating the assumption on which my action had been founded; but what he finally said was: "Do you mean now—here?"

"There couldn't be a better place or time." He looked round him uneasily, and I had the rare—oh, the queer!—impression of the very first symptom I had seen in him of the approach of immediate fear. It was as if he were suddenly afraid of me—which struck me, indeed, as perhaps the best thing to make him. Yet in the very pang of the effort I felt it vain to try sternness, and I heard myself the next instant so gentle as to be almost grotesque. "You want so to go out again?"

"Awfully!" He smiled at me heroically, and the touching little bravery of it was enhanced by his actually flushing with pain. He had picked up his hat, which he had brought in, and stood twirling it in a way that gave me, even as I was just nearly reaching port, a perverse horror of what I was doing. To do it in *any* way was an act of violence, for what did it consist of but the obtrusion of the idea of grossness and guilt on a small, helpless creature who had been for me a revelation of the possibilities of beautiful intercourse? Wasn't it base to create for a being so

exquisite a mere alien awkwardness? I suppose I now read into our situation a clearness it couldn't have had at the time, for I seem to see our poor eyes already lighted with some spark of a prevision of the anguish that was to come. So we circled about with terrors and scruples, fighters not daring to close. But it was for each other we feared! That kept us a little longer suspended and unbruised. "I'll tell you everything," Miles said—"I mean I'll tell you anything you like. You'll stay on with me, and we shall both be all right, and I *will* tell you—I *will*. But not now."

"Why not now?"

My resistance turned him from me and kept him once more at his window in a silence during which, between us, you might have heard a pin drop. Then he was before me again with the air of a person for whom, outside, someone who had frankly to be reckoned with was waiting. "I have to see Luke."

I had not yet reduced him to quite so vulgar a lie, and I felt proportionately ashamed. But, horrible as it was, his lies made up my truth. I achieved thoughtfully a few loops of my knitting.

"Well, then go to Luke, and I'll wait for what you promise. Only in return for that satisfy, before you leave me, one very much smaller request."

He looked as if he felt he had succeeded enough to be able still a little to bargain. "Very much smaller—?"

"Yes, a mere fraction of the whole. Tell me,"—oh, my work preoccupied me, and I was offhand!—"if, yesterday afternoon, from the table in the hall, you took, you know, my letter."

24

My grasp of how he received this suffered for a minute from something that I can describe only as a fierce split of my attention—a stroke that at first, as I sprang straight up, reduced me to the mere blind movement of getting hold of him, drawing him close and, while I just fell for support against the nearest piece of furniture, instinctively keeping him with his back to the window.

The appearance was full upon us that I had already had to deal with here: Peter Quint had come into view like a sentinel before a prison. The next thing I saw was that, from outside, he had

reached the window, and then I knew that, close to the glass and glaring in through it, he offered once more to the room his white face of damnation. It represents but grossly what took place within me at the sight to say that on the second my decision was made ; yet I believe that no woman so overwhelmed ever in so short a time recovered her command of the *act*. It came to me in the very horror of the immediate presence that the act would be, seeing and facing what I saw and faced, to keep the boy himself unaware. The inspiration—I can call it by no other name—was that I felt how voluntarily, how transcendently, I *might*. It was like fighting with a demon for a human soul, and when I had fairly so appraised it I saw how the human soul—held out, in the tremor of my hands, at arm's length—had a perfect dew of sweat on a lovely childish forehead. The face that as close to mine was as white as the face against the glass, and out of it presently came a sound, not low nor weak, but as if from much further away, that I drank like a waft of fragrance.

“Yes—I took it.”

At this, with a moan of joy, I enfolded, I drew him close ; and while I held him to my breast, where I could feel in the sudden fever of his little body the tremendous pulse of his little heart, I kept my eyes on the thing at the window and saw it move and shift its posture. I have likened it to a sentinel, but its slow wheel, for a moment, was rather the prowl of a baffled beast. My present quickened courage, however, was such that, not too much to let it through, I had to shade, as it were, my flame. Meanwhile the glare of the face was again at the window, the scoundrel fixed as if to watch and wait. It was the very confidence that I might now defy him, as well as the positive certitude, by this time, of the child's unconsciousness, that made me go on. “What did you take it for ?”

“To see what you said about it”

“You opened the letter ?”

“I opened it.”

My eyes were now, as I held him off a little again, on Miles's own face, in which the collapse of mockery showed me how complete was the ravage of uneasiness. What was prodigious was that at last, by my success, his sense was scaled and his communication stopped : he knew that he was in presence, but knew not of what, and knew still less that I also was and that I did know. And what did this strain of trouble matter when my eyes went back to the window only to see that the air was clear again and—by my personal triumph—the influence quenched ? There was

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

nothing there. I felt that the cause was mine and that I should surely get *all*. "And you found nothing!"—I let my elation out.

He gave me the most mournful, thoughtful little headshake. "Nothing."

"Nothing, nothing!" I almost shouted in my joy.

"Nothing, nothing," he sadly repeated.

I kissed his forehead; it was drenched. "So what have you done with it?"

"I've burnt it."

"Burnt it?" It was now or never. "Is that what you did at school?"

Oh, what this brought up! "At school?"

"Did you take letters?—or other things?"

"Other things?" He appeared now to be thinking of something far off and that reached him only through the pressure of his anxiety. Yet it did reach him. "Did I *steal*?"

I felt myself redden to the roots of my hair as well as wonder if it were more strange to put to a gentleman such a question or to see him take it with allowances that gave the very distance of his fall in the world. "Was it for that you mightn't go back?"

The only thing he felt was rather a dreary little surprise. "Did you know I mightn't go back?"

"I know everything."

He gave me at this the longest and strangest look. "Everything?"

"Everything. Therefore *did* you—?" But I couldn't say it again.

Miles could, very simply. "No. I didn't steal."

My face must have shown him I believed him utterly; yet my hands—but it was for pure tenderness—shook him as if to ask him why, if it was all for nothing, he had condemned me to months of torment. "What then did you do?"

He looked in vague pain all round the top of the room and drew his breath, two or three times over, as if with difficulty. He might have been standing at the bottom of the sea and raising his eyes to some faint green twilight. "Well—I said things."

"Only that?"

"They thought it was enough!"

"To turn you out for?"

Never, truly, had a person "turned out" shown so little to explain it as this little person! He appeared to weigh my question,

but in a manner quite detached and almost helpless. "Well, I suppose I oughtn't."

"But to whom did you say them?"

He evidently tried to remember, but it dropped—he had lost it. "I don't know!"

He almost smiled at me in the desolation of his surrender, which was, indeed, practically, by this time, so complete that I ought to have left it there. But I was infatuated—I was blind with victory, though even then the very effect that was to have brought him so much nearer was already that of added separation. "Was it to every one?" I asked.

"No; it was only to—" But he gave a sick little headshake. "I don't remember their names."

"Were they then so many?"

"No—only a few. Those I liked."

Those he liked? I seemed to float not into clearness, but into a darker obscure, and within a minute there had come to me out of my very pity the appalling alarm of his being perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding and bottomless, for if he *were* innocent what then on earth was *I*? Paralysed, while it lasted, by the mere brush of the question, I let him go a little, so that, with a deep-drawn sigh, he turned away from me again; which, as he faced toward the clear window, I suffered, feeling that I had nothing now there to keep him from. "And did they repeat what you said?" I went on after a moment.

He was soon at some distance from me, still breathing hard and again with the air, though now without anger for it, of being confined against his will. Once more, as he had done before, he looked up at the dim day as if, of what had hitherto sustained him, nothing was left but an unspeakable anxiety. "Oh, yes," he nevertheless replied—"they must have repeated them. To those *they* liked," he added.

There was somehow less of it than I had expected; but I turned it over. "And these things came round—?"

"To the masters? Oh, yes!" he answered very simply. "But I didn't know they'd tell."

"The masters? They didn't—they've never told. That's why I ask you."

He turned to me again his little beautiful fevered face. "Yes, it was too bad."

"Too bad?"

"What I suppose I sometimes said. To write home."

I can't name the exquisite pathos of the contradiction given to

such a speech by such a speaker ; I only know that the next instant I heard myself throw off with homely force : " Stuff and nonsense ! " But the next after that I must have sounded stern enough. " What *were* these things ? "

My sternness was all for his judge, his executioner ; yet it made him avert himself again, and that movement made *me*, with a single bound and an irrepressible cry, spring straight upon him. For there again, against the glass, as if to blight his confession and stay his answer, was the hideous author of our woe—the white face of damnation. I felt a sick swim at the drop of my victory and all the return of my battle, so that the wildness of my veritable leap only served as a great betrayal. I saw him, from the midst of my act, meet it with a divination, and on the perception that even now he only guessed, and that the window was still to his own eyes free, I let the impulse flame up to convert the climax of his dismay into the very proof of his liberation. " No more, no more, no more ! " I shrieked to my visitant as I tried to press him against me.

" Is she *here* ? " Miles panted as he caught with his sealed eyes the direction of my words. Then as his strange " she " staggered me and, with a gasp, I echoed it, " Miss Jessel, Miss Jessel ! " he with sudden fury gave me back.

I seized, stupefied, his supposition—some sequel to what we had done to Flora, but this made me only want to show him that it was better still than that. " It's not Miss Jessel ! But it's at the window—straight before us. It's *there*—the coward horror, there for the last time ! "

At this, after a second in which his head made the movement of a baffled dog's on a scent and then gave a frantic little shake for air and light, he was at me in a white rage, bewildered, glaring vainly over the place and missing wholly, though it now, to my sense, filled the room like the taste of poison, the wide overwhelming presence. " It's *he* ? "

I was so determined to have all my proof that I dashed into ice to challenge him. " Whom do you mean by ' he ' ? "

" Peter Quint—you devil ! " His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. " *Where* ? "

They are in my ears still, his supreme surrender of the name and his tribute to my devotion. " What does he matter now, my own ?—what will he *ever* matter ? *I* have you," I launched at the beast, " but he has lost you for ever ! " Then, for the demonstration of my work, " There, *there* ! " I said to Miles.

But he ~~had~~ already jerked straight round, stared, glared again,

and seen but the quiet day. With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall. I caught him, yes, I held him—it may be imagined with what a passion ; but at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was that I held. We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped.

THE VELVET GLOVE

I

HE thought he had already, poor John Berridge, tasted in their fullness the sweets of success ; but nothing yet had been more charming to him than when the young Lord, as he irresistibly and, for greater certitude, quite correctly figured him, fairly sought out, in Paris, the new literary star that had begun to hang, with a fresh red light, over the vast, even though rather confused, Anglo-Saxon horizon ; positively approaching that celebrity with a shy and artless appeal. The young Lord invoked on this occasion the celebrity's prized judgment of a special literary case ; and Berridge could take the whole manner of it for one of the " quaintest " little acts displayed to his amused eyes, up to now, on the stage of European society—albeit these eyes were quite aware, in general, of missing everywhere no more of the human scene than possible, and of having of late been particularly awake to the large extensions of it spread before him (since so he could but fondly read his fate) under the omen of his prodigious " hit." It was because of his hit that he was having rare opportunities—of which he was so honestly and humbly proposing, as he would have said, to make the most : it was because every one in the world (so far had the thing gone) was reading *The Heart of Gold* as just a slightly too fat volume, or sitting out the same as just a fifth-act too long play, that he found himself floated on a tide he would scarce have dared to show his favourite hero sustained by, found a hundred agreeable and interesting things happen to him which were all, one way or another, affluents of the golden stream.

The great renewed resonance—renewed by the incredible luck of the play—was always in his ears without so much as a conscious turn of his head to listen ; so that the queer world of his fame was not the mere usual field of the Anglo-Saxon boom, but positively the bottom of the *whole* theatric sea, unplumbed source of the wave that had borne him in the course of a year or two over German, French, Italian, Russian, Scandinavian foot-lights. Paris itself really appeared for the hour the centre of his cyclone, with reports and " returns," to say nothing of agents and emissaries, converging from the minor capitals ; though his impatience was scarce the less keen to get back to London, where his work had had no such critical excoriation to survive, no such lesson of

anguish to learn, as it had received at the hand of supreme authority, of that French authority which was in such a matter the only one to be artistically reckoned with. If his spirit indeed had had to reckon with it his fourth act practically hadn't ; it continued to make him blush every night for the public more even than the inimitable *feuilleton* had made him blush for himself.

This had figured, however, after all, the one bad drop in his cup ; so that, for the rest, his high-water mark might well have been, that evening at Gloriani's studio, the approach of his odd and charming applicant, vaguely introduced at the latter's very own request by their hostess, who, with an honest, helpless, genial gesture, washed her fat begemmed hands of the name and identity of either, but left the fresh, fair, ever so habitually assured, yet ever so easily awkward Englishman with his plea to put forth. There was that in this pleasant personage which could still make Berridge wonder what conception of profit from him might have, all incalculably, taken form in such a head—these being truly the last intrenchments of our hero's modesty. He wondered, the splendid young man, he wondered awfully, he wondered (it was unmistakable) quite nervously, he wondered, to John's ardent and acute imagination, quite beautifully, if the author of *The Heart of Gold* would mind just looking at a book by a friend of his, a great friend, which he himself believed rather clever, and had in fact found very charming, but as to which—if it really wouldn't bore Mr. Berridge—he should so like the verdict of some one who knew. His friend was awfully ambitious, and he thought there was something in it—with all of which might he send the book to any address ?

Berridge thought of many things while the young Lord thus charged upon him, and it was odd that no one of them was any question of the possible worth of the offered achievement—which, for that matter, was certain to be of the quality of *all* the books, to say nothing of the plays, and the projects for plays, with which, for some time past, he had seen his daily postbag distended. He had made out, on looking at these things, no difference at all from one to the other. Here, however, was something more—something that made his fellow-guest's overture *independently* interesting and, as he might imagine, important. He smiled, he was friendly and vague ; said " A work of fiction, I suppose ? " and that he didn't pretend ever to pronounce, that he in fact quite hated, always, to have to, not " knowing," as he felt, any better than anyone else ; but would gladly look at anything, under that demur, if it would give any pleasure. Perhaps the very brightest and most diamond-like twinkle he had yet seen

the star of his renown emit was just the light brought into his young Lord's eyes by this so easy consent to oblige. It was easy because the presence before him was from moment to moment referring itself back to some recent observation or memory ; something caught somewhere, within a few weeks or months, as he had moved about, and that seemed to flutter forth at this stir of the folded leaves of his recent experience very much as a gathered faded flower, placed there for "pressing," might drop from between the pages of a volume opened at hazard.

He had seen him before, this splendid and sympathetic person—whose flattering appeal was by no means *all* that made him sympathetic ; he had met him, had noted, had wondered about him, had in fact imaginatively, intellectually, so to speak, quite yearned over him, in some conjunction lately, though ever so fleetingly, apprehended : which circumstance constituted precisely an association as tormenting, for the few minutes, as it was vague, and set him to sounding, intensely and vainly, the face that itself figured everything agreeable except recognition. He couldn't remember, and the young man didn't ; distinctly, yes, they had been in presence, during the previous winter, by some chance of travel, through Sicily, through Italy, through the south of France, but his *Seigneurie*—so Berridge liked exotically to phrase it—had then (in ignorance of the present reasons) not noticed *him*. It was positive for the man of established identity, all the while too, and through the perfect lucidity of his sense of achievement in an air "conducting" nothing but the loudest bang, that this was fundamentally much less remarkable than the fact of his being made up to in such a quarter now. That was the disservice, in a manner, of one's having so much imagination : the mysterious values of other types kept looming larger before you than the doubtless often higher but comparatively familiar ones of your own, and if you had anything of the artist's real feeling for life the attraction and amusement of possibilities so projected were worth more to you, in nineteen moods out of twenty, than the sufficiency, the serenity, the felicity, whatever it might be, of your stale personal certitudes. You were intellectually, you were "artistically" rather abject, in fine, if your curiosity (in the grand sense of the term) wasn't worth more to you than your dignity. What *was* your dignity, "anyway," but just the consistency of your curiosity, and what moments were ever so ignoble for you as, under the blighting breath of the false gods, stupid conventions, traditions, examples, your lapses from that consistency ? His *Seigneurie*, at all events, delightfully, hadn't the least real idea of what any John Berridge was talking about,

and the latter felt that if he had been less beautifully witless, and thereby less true to his right figure, it might scarce have been forgiven him.

His right figure was that of life in irreflective joy and at the highest thinkable level of prepared security and unconscious insolence. What was the pale page of fiction compared with the intimately personal adventure that, in almost any direction, he would have been all so stupidly, all so gallantly, all so instinctively and, by every presumption, so prevailingly ready for? Berridge would have given six months' "royalties" for even an hour of his looser dormant consciousness—since one was oneself, after all, no worm, but an heir of all the ages too—and yet without being able to supply chapter and verse for the felt, the huge difference. His *Seigneurie* was tall and straight, but so, thank goodness, was the author of *The Heart of Gold*, who had no such vulgar "mug" either; and there was no intrinsic inferiority in being a bit inordinately, and so it might have seemed a bit strikingly, black-browed instead of being fair as the morning. Again while his new friend delivered himself our own tried in vain to place him; he indulged in plenty of pleasant, if rather restlessly headlong sound, the confessed incoherence of a happy mortal who had always many things "on," and who, while waiting at any moment for connections and consummations, had fallen into the way of talking, as they said, all artlessly, and a trifle more betrayingly, against time. He would always be having appointments, and somehow of a high "romantic" order, to keep, and the imperfect punctualities of others to wait for—though who would be of a quality to make such a pampered personage wait very much our young analyst could only enjoy asking himself. There were women who might be of a quality—half a dozen of those perhaps, of those alone, about the world; our friend was as sure of this, by the end of four minutes, as if he knew all about it.

After saying he would send him the book the young Lord indeed dropped that subject; he had asked where he might send it, and had had an "Oh, I shall remember!" on John's mention of an hotel; but he had made no further dash into literature, and it was ten to one that this would be the last the distinguished author might hear of the volume. Such again was a note of these high existences—that made one content to ask of them no whit of other consistency than that of carrying off the particular occasion, whatever it might be, in a dazzle of amiability and felicity and leaving *that* as a sufficient trace of their passage. Sought and achieved consistency was but an angular, a secondary motion; compared with the air of complete freedom it might

have an effect of deformity. There was no placing this figure of radiant ease, for Berridge, in any relation that didn't appear not good enough—that is among the relations that hadn't been too good for Berridge himself. He was all right where he was ; the great Gloriani somehow made that law ; his house, with his supreme artistic position, was good enough for anyone, and to-night in especial there were charming people, more charming than our friend could recall from any other scene, as the natural train or circle, as he might say, of such a presence. For an instant he thought he had got the face as a specimen of imperturbability watched, with wonder, across the hushed rattle of roulette at Monte Carlo ; but this quickly became as improbable as any question of a vulgar *table d'hôte*, or a steam-boat deck, or a herd of fellow-pilgrims cicerone-led, or even an opera-box serving, during a performance, for frame of a type observed from the stalls. One placed young gods and goddesses only when one placed them on Olympus, and it met the case, always, that they were of Olympian race, and that they glimmered for one, at the best, through their silver cloud, like the visiting apparitions in an epic.

This was brief and beautiful indeed till something happened that gave it, for Berridge, on the spot, a prodigious extension—an extension really as prodigious, after a little, as if he had suddenly seen the silver clouds multiply and then the whole of Olympus presently open. Music, breaking upon the large air, enjoined immediate attention, and in a moment he was listening, with the rest of the company, to an eminent tenor, who stood by the piano ; and was aware, with it, that his Englishman had turned away and that in the vast, rich, tapestried room where, in spite of figures and objects so numerous, clear spaces, wide vistas and, as they might be called, becoming situations abounded, there had been from elsewhere, at the signal of unmistakable song, a rapid accession of guests. At first he but took this in, and the way that several young women, for whom seats had been found, looked charming in the rapt attitude ; while even the men, mostly standing and grouped, “composed,” in their stillness, scarce less impressively, under the sway of the divine voice. It ruled the scene, to the last intensity, and yet our young man's fine sense found still a resource in the range of the eyes, without sound or motion, while all the rest of consciousness was held down as by a hand mailed in silver. It was better, in this way, than the opera—John alertly thought of that : the composition sung might be Wagnerian, but no Tristram, no Iseult, no Parsifal and no Kundry of them all could ever show, could ever “act” to the music, as our friend had thus the power of

seeing his dear contemporaries of either sex (armoured *they* so otherwise than in cheap Teutonic tinsel !) just continuously and inscrutably sit to it.

It made, the whole thing together, an enchantment amid which he had in truth, at a given moment, ceased to distinguish parts—so that he was himself certainly at last soaring as high as the singer's voice and forgetting, in a lost gaze at the splendid ceiling, everything of the occasion but what his intelligence poured into it. This, as happened, was a flight so sublime that by the time he had dropped his eyes again a cluster of persons near the main door had just parted to give way to a belated lady who slipped in, through the gap made for her, and stood for some minutes full in his view. It was a proof of the perfect hush that no one stirred to offer her a seat, and her entrance, in her high grace, had yet been so noiseless that she could remain at once immensely exposed and completely unabashed. For Berridge, once more, if the scenic show before him so melted into the music, here precisely might have been the heroine herself advancing to the footlights at her cue. The interest deepened to a thrill, and everything, at the touch of his recognition of this personage, absolutely the most beautiful woman now present, fell exquisitely together and gave him what he had been wanting from the moment of his taking in his young Englishman.

It was there, the missing connection : her arrival had on the instant lighted it by a flash. Olympian herself, supremely, divinely Olympian, she arrived, could *only* have arrived, for the one person present of really equal race, our young man's late converser, whose flattering demonstration might now stand for one of the odd extravagant forms taken by nervous impatience. This charming, this dazzling woman had been one member of the couple disturbed, to his intimate conviction, the autumn previous, on his being pushed by the officials, at the last moment, into a compartment of the train that was to take him from Cremona to Mantua—where, failing a stop, he had had to keep his place. The other member, by whose felt but unseized identity he had been haunted, was the unconsciously insolent form of guaranteed happiness he had just been engaged with. The sense of the admirable intimacy that, having taken its precautions, had not reckoned with his irruption—this image had remained with him ; to say nothing of the interest of aspect of the associated figures, so stamped somehow with rarity, so beautifully distinct from the common occupants of padded corners, and yet on the subject of whom, for the romantic structure he was immediately to raise, he had not had a scrap of evidence.

THE VELVET GLOVE

If he had imputed to them conditions it was all his own doing : it came from his inveterate habit of abysmal imputation, the snatching of the ell wherever the inch peeped out, without which where would have been the tolerability of life ? It didn't matter now what he had imputed—and he always held that his expenses of imputation were, at the worst, a compliment to those inspiring them. It only mattered that each of the pair had been then what he really saw each now—full, that is, of the pride of their youth and beauty and fortune and freedom, though at the same time particularly preoccupied : preoccupied, that is, with the affairs and above all with the passions, of Olympus. Who had they been, and what ? Whence had they come, whither were they bound, what tie united them, what adventure engaged, what felicity, tempered by what peril, magnificently, dramatically attended ? These had been his questions, all so inevitable and so impertinent, at the time, and to the exclusion of any scruples over his not postulating an inane honeymoon, his not taking the “ tie,” as he should doubtless properly have done, for the mere blest matrimonial ; and he now retracted not one of them, flushing as they did before him again with their old momentary life. To feel his two friends renewedly in presence—friends of the fleeting hour though they had but been, and with whom he had exchanged no sign save the vaguest of salutes on finally relieving them of his company—was only to be conscious that he hadn't, on the spot, done them, so to speak, half justice, and that, for his superior entertainment, there would be ever so much more of them to

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It might already have been coming indeed, with an immense stride, when, scarce more than ten minutes later, he was aware that the distinguished stranger had brought the Princess straight across the room to speak to him. He had failed in the interval of any glimpse of their closer meeting ; for the great tenor had sung another song and then stopped, immediately on which Madame Gloriani had made his pulse quicken to a different, if not to a finer, throb by hovering before him once more with the man in the world he most admired, as it were, looking at him over her shoulder. The man in the world he most admired, the greatest then of contemporary Dramatists—and bearing, independently, the name inscribed if not in deepest incision at least in thickest gilding on the rich recreative roll—this prodigious

personage was actually to suffer "presentation" to him at the good lady's generous but ineffectual hands, and had in fact the next instant, left alone with him, bowed, in formal salutation, the massive, curly, witty head, so "romantic" yet so modern, so "artistic" and ironic yet somehow so civic, so Gallic yet somehow so cosmic, his personal vision of which had not hitherto transcended that of the possessor of a signed and framed photograph in a consecrated quarter of a writing-table.

It was positive, however, that poor John was afterward to remember of this conjunction nothing whatever but the fact of the great man's looking at him very hard, straight in the eyes, and of his not having himself scrupled to do as much, and with a confessed intensity of appetite. It was improbable, he was to recognise, that they had, for the few minutes, only stared and grimaced, like pitted boxers or wrestlers; but what had abode with him later on, none the less, was just the cherished memory of his not having so lost presence of mind as to fail of feeding on his impression. It was precious and precarious, that was perhaps all there would be of it; and his subsequent consciousness was quite to cherish this queer view of the silence, neither awkward nor empty nor harsh, but on the contrary quite charged and brimming, that represented for him his use, his unforgettable enjoyment in fact, of his opportunity. Had nothing passed in words? Well, no misery of murmured "homage," thank goodness; though something must have been said, certainly, to lead up, as they put it at the theatre, to John's having asked the head of the profession, before they separated, if he by chance knew who the so radiantly handsome young woman might be, the one who had so lately come in and who wore the pale yellow dress, of the strange tone, and the magnificent pearls. They must have separated soon, it was further to have been noted; since it was before the advance of the pair, their wonderful dazzling charge upon him, that he had distinctly seen the great man, at a distance again, block out from his sight the harmony of the faded gold and the pearls—to speak only of that—and plant himself there (the mere high Atlasback of renown to Berridge now) as for communion with them. He had blocked everything out, to this tune, effectually; with nothing of the matter left for our friend meanwhile but that, as he had said, the beautiful lady was the Princess. What Princess, or the Princess of what?—our young man had afterward wondered; his companion's reply having lost itself in the prelude of an outburst by another vocalist who had approached the piano.

It was after these things that she so incredibly came to him,

attended by her adorer—since he took it for absolute that the young Lord was her adorer, as who indeed mightn't be?—and scarce waiting, in her bright simplicity, for any form of introduction. It may thus be said in a word that this was the manner in which she made our hero's acquaintance, a satisfaction that she on the spot described to him as really wanting of late to her felicity. "I've read everything, you know, and *The Heart of Gold* three times": she put it all immediately on that ground, while the young Lord now smiled, beside her, as if it were quite the sort of thing he had done too; and while, further, the author of the work yielded to the consciousness that whereas in general he had come at last scarce to be able to bear the iteration of those words, which affected him as a mere vain vocal convulsion, so not a breath of this association now attended them, so such a person as the Princess could make of them what she would. Unless it was to be really what *he* would!—this occurred to him in the very thick of the prodigy, no single shade of possibility of which was less prodigious than any other. It was a declaration, simply, the admirable young woman was treating him to, a profession of "artistic sympathy"—for she was in a moment to use this very term that made for them a large, clear, common ether, an element all uplifted and rare, of which they could equally partake.

If she was Olympian—as in her rich and regular young beauty, that of some divine Greek mask over-painted say by Titian, she more and more appeared to him—this offered air was that of the gods themselves: she might have been, with her long rustle across the room, Artemis decorated, hung with pearls, for her worshippers, yet disconcerting them by having under an impulse just faintly fierce, snatched the cup of gold from Hebe. It was to him, John Berridge, she thus publicly offered it; and it was his over-topping *confrère* of shortly before who was the worshipper most disconcerted. John had happened to catch, even at its distance, after these friends had joined him, the momentary deep, grave estimate, in the great Dramatist's salient watching eyes, of the Princess's so singular performance: the touch perhaps this, in the whole business, that made Berridge's sense of it most sharp. The sense of it as *prodigy* didn't in the least entail his feeling abject—any more, that is, than in the due dazzled degree; for surely there would have been supreme wonder in the eagerness of her exchange of mature glory for thin notoriety, hadn't it still exceeded everything that an Olympian of such race should have found herself bothered, as they said, to "read" at all—and most of all to read three times!

With the turn the matter took as an effect of this meeting,

Berridge was more than once to find himself almost ashamed for her—since it seemed never to occur to her to be so for herself ; he was jealous of the type where she might have been taken as insolently careless of it ; his advantage (unless indeed it had been his ruin) being that he could inordinately reflect upon it, could wander off thereby into kinds of licence of which she was incapable. He hadn't, for himself, waited till now to be sure of what he would do were *he* an Olympian ; he would leave his own stuff snugly unread, to begin with ; that would be a beautiful start for an Olympian career. He should have been as unable to write those works in short as to make anything else of them ; and he should have had no more arithmetic for computing fingers than any perfect-headed marble Apollo mutilated at the wrists. He should have consented to know but the grand personal adventure on the grand personal basis : nothing short of this, no poor cognizance of confusable, pettifogging things, the sphere of earth-grubbing questions and twopenny issues, would begin to be, on any side, Olympian enough.

Even the great Dramatist, with his tempered and tested steel and his immense "assured" position, even he was not Olympian : the look, full of the torment of earth, with which he had seen the Princess turn her back, and for such a purpose, on the prized privilege of his notice, testified sufficiently to that. Still, comparatively, it was to be said, the question of a personal relation with an authority so eminent on the subject of the passions—to say nothing of the rest of his charm—might have had for an ardent young woman (and the Princess was unmistakably ardent) the absolute attraction of romance : unless, again, prodigy of prodigies, she were looking for her romance very particularly elsewhere. Yet where could she have been looking for it, Berridge was to ask himself with private intensity, in a manner to leave her so at her ease for appearing to offer *him* everything?—so free to be quite divinely gentle with him, to hover there before him in all her mild, bright, smooth sublimity and to say : "I should be so very grateful if you'd come to see me."

There succeeded this a space of time of which he was afterward to lose all account, was never to recover the history ; his only view of it being that an interruption, some incident that kept them a while separate, had then taken place, yet that during their separation, of half an hour or whatever, they had still somehow not lost sight of each other, but had found their eyes meeting, in deep communion, all across the great peopled room ; meeting and wanting to meet, wanting—it was the most extraordinary thing in the world for the suppression of stages, for confessed

precipitate intensity—to use together every instant of the hour that might be left them. Yet to use it for what?—unless, like beautiful fabulous figures in some old-world legend, for the frankest and almost the crudest avowal of the impression they had made on each other. He couldn't have named, later on, any other person she had during this space been engaged with, any more than he was to remember in the least what he had himself ostensibly done, who had spoken to him, whom he had spoken to, or whether he hadn't just stood and publicly gaped or languished.

Ah, Olympians were unconventional indeed—that was a part of their high bravery and privilege ; but what it also appeared to attest in this wondrous manner was that they could communicate to their chosen in three minutes, by the mere light of their eyes, the same shining cynicism. He was to wonder of course, tinglingly enough, whether he had really made an ass of himself, and there was this amount of evidence for it that there certainly *had* been a series of moments each one of which glowed with the lucid sense that, as she couldn't like him as much as *that* either for his acted clap-trap or for his printed verbiage, what it must come to was that she liked him, and to such a tune, just for himself and quite after no other fashion than that in which every goddess in the calendar had, when you came to look, sooner or later liked some prepossessing young shepherd. The question would thus have been, for him, with a still sharper eventual ache, of whether he positively *had*, as an effect of the miracle, been petrified, before fifty pair of eyes, to the posture of a prepossessing shepherd—and would perhaps have left him under the shadow of some such imputable fatuity if his consciousness hadn't, at a given moment, cleared up to still stranger things.

The agent of the change was, as quite congruously happened, none other than the shining youth whom he now seemed to himself to have been thinking of for ever so long, for a much longer time than he had ever in his life spent at an evening party, as the young Lord : which personage suddenly stood before him again, holding him up an odd object and smiling, as if in reference to it, with a gladness that at once struck our friend as almost too absurd for belief. The object was incongruous by reason of its being, to a second and less pre-occupied glance, a book ; and what had befallen Berridge within twenty minutes was that they—the Princess and he, that is—had got such millions of miles, or at least such thousands of years, away from *those* platitudes. The book, he found himself assuming, could only be *his* book (it seemed also to have a tawdry red cover) ; and there came to him

memories, dreadfully false notes sounded so straight again by his new acquaintance, of certain altogether different persons who at certain altogether different parties had flourished volumes before him very much with that insinuating gesture, that arch expression and that fell intention. The meaning of these things—of all possible breaks of the charm at such an hour!—was that he should “signature” the ugly thing, and with a characteristic quotation or sentiment: that was the way people simpered and squirmed, the way they mouthed and beckoned, when animated by such purposes; and it already, on the spot, almost broke his heart to see such a type as that of the young Lord brought, by the vulgarest of fashions, so low. This state of quick displeasure in Berridge, however, was founded on a deeper question—the question of how in the world he was to remain for himself a prepossessing shepherd if he should consent to come back to these base actualities. It was true that even while this wonderment held him, his aggressor’s perfect good conscience had placed the matter in a slightly different light.

“By an extraordinary chance I’ve found a copy of my friend’s novel on one of the tables here—I see by the inscription that she has presented it to Gloriani. So if you’d like to glance at it—!” And the young Lord, in the pride of his association with the eminent thing, held it out to Berridge as artlessly as if it had been a striking natural specimen of some sort, a rosy round apple grown in his own orchard, or an exceptional precious stone, to be admired for its weight and lustre. Berridge accepted the offer mechanically—relieved at the prompt fading of his worst fear, yet feeling in himself a tell-tale facial blankness for the still absolutely anomalous character of his friend’s appeal. He was even tempted for a moment to lay the volume down without looking at it—only with some extemporised promise to borrow it of their host and take it home, to give himself to it at an easier moment. Then the very expression of his fellow-guest’s own countenance determined in him a different and a still more dreadful view; in fact an immediate collapse of the dream in which he had for the splendid previous space of time been living. The young Lord himself, in his radiant costly barbarism, figured far better than John Berridge could do the prepossessing shepherd, the beautiful mythological mortal “distinguished” by a goddess; for our hero now saw that his whole manner of dealing with his ridiculous tribute was marked exactly by the grand simplicity, the prehistoric good faith, as one might call it, of far-off romantic and “plastic” creatures, figures of exquisite Arcadian stamp, glorified rustics like those of the train of peasants in *A Winter’s*

I ate, who thought nothing of such treasure-trove, on a Claude Lorrain sea-strand, as a royal infant wrapped in purple : something in that fabulous style of exhibition appearing exactly what his present demonstration might have been prompted by.

The Top of the Tree, by Amy Evans—scarce credible words floating before Berridge after he had with an anguish of effort dropped his eyes on the importunate title-page—represented an object as alien to the careless grace of goddess-haunted Arcady as a washed-up “kodak” from a wrecked ship might have been to the appreciation of some islander of wholly unvisited seas. Nothing could have been more in the tone of an islander deplorably diverted from his native interests and dignities than the glibness with which John’s own child of nature went on. “It’s her pen-name, Amy Evans”—he couldn’t have said it otherwise had he been a blue-chinned penny-a-liner—yet marking it with a disconnectedness of intelligence that kept up all the poetry of his own situation and only crashed into that of other persons. The reference put the author of *The Heart of Gold* quite into *his* place, but left the speaker absolutely free of Arcady. “Thanks awfully”—Berridge somehow clutched at that, to keep everything from swimming. “Yes, I should like to look at it,” he managed, horribly grimacing now, he believed, to say ; and there was in fact a strange short interlude after this in which he scarce knew what had become of anyone or of anything ; in which he only seemed to himself to stand alone in a desolate place where even its desolation didn’t save him from having to stare at the greyest of printed pages. Nothing here helped anything else, since the stamped greyness didn’t even in itself make it impossible his eyes should follow such sentences as : “The loveliness of the face, which was that of the glorious period in which Pheidias reigned supreme, and which owed its most exquisite note to that shell-like curl of the upper lip which always somehow recalls for us the smile with which wind-blown Astarte must have risen from the salt sea to which she owed her birth and her terrible moods” ; or “It was too much for all the passionate woman in her, and she let herself go, over the flowering land that had been, but was no longer, their love, with an effect of blighting desolation that might have proceeded from one of the more physical, though not more awful, convulsions of nature.”

He seemed to know later on that other and much more natural things had occurred ; as that, for instance, with now at last a definite intermission of the rare music that for a long time past, save at the briefest intervals, had kept all participants ostensibly attentive and motionless, and that in spite of its high quality and

the supposed privilege of listening to it he had allowed himself not to catch a note of; there was a great rustling and shifting and vociferous drop to a lower plane, more marked still with the quick clearance of a way to supper and a lively dispersal of most of the guests. Hadn't he made out, through the queer glare of appearances, though they yet somehow all came to him as confused and unreal, that the Princess was no longer there, wasn't even only crowded out of his range by the immediate multiplication of her court, the obsequious court that the change of pitch had at once permitted to close round her; that Gloriani had offered her his arm, in a gallant official way, as to the greatest lady present, and that he was left with half a dozen persons more knowing than the others, who had promptly taken, singly or in couples, to a closer inspection of the fine small scattered treasures of the studio?

He himself stood there, rueful and stricken, nursing a silly red-bound book under his arm very much as if he might have been holding on tight to an upright stake, or to the nearest piece of furniture, during some impression of a sharp earthquake-shock or of an attack of dyspeptic dizziness; albeit indeed that he wasn't conscious of this absurd, this instinctive nervous clutch till the thing that was to be more wonderful than any yet suddenly flared up for him—the sight of the Princess again on the threshold of the room, poised there an instant, in her exquisite grace, for recovery of some one or of something, and then, at recognition of him, coming straight to him across the empty place as if he alone, and nobody and nothing else, were what she incredibly wanted. She was there, she was radiantly *at* him, as if she had known and loved him for ten years—ten years during which, however, she had never quite been able, in spite of undiscouraged attempts, to cure him, as goddesses *had* to cure shepherds, of his mere mortal shyness.

“Ah no, not *that* one!” she said at once, with her divine familiarity; for she had in the flash of an eye “spotted” the particular literary production he seemed so very fondly to have possessed himself of and against which all the Amy Evans in her, as she would doubtless have put it, clearly wished on the spot to discriminate. She pulled it away from him; he let it go; he scarce knew what was happening—only made out that she distinguished the right one, the one that should have been shown him, as blue or green or purple, and intimated that her other friend, her fellow-Olympian, as Berridge had thought of him from the first, really did too clumsily bungle matters, poor dear, with his officiousness over the red one! She went on really as if she had come for that, some such rectification, some such eagerness

of reunion with dear Mr. Berridge, some talk, after all the tiresome music, of questions really urgent ; while, thanks to the supreme strangeness of it, the high tide of golden fable floated him afresh, and her pretext and her plea, the queerness of her offered motive, melted away after the fashion of the enveloping clouds that do their office in epics and idylls.

"You didn't perhaps know I'm Amy Evans," she smiled, "or even perhaps that I write in English—which I love, I assure you, as much as you can yourself do, and which gives one (doesn't it ? for who should know if not you ?) the biggest of publics. I 'just love'—don't they say ?—your American millions ; and all the more that they really *take* me for Amy Evans, as I've just wanted to be taken, to be loved too for myself, don't you know ?—that they haven't seemed to try at all to 'go behind' (don't you say ?) my poor dear little *nom de guerre*. But it's the new one, my last, *The Velvet Glove*, that I should like you to judge me by—if such a *corvée* isn't too horrible for you to think of ; though I admit it's a move straight in the romantic direction—since after all (for I might as well make a clean breast of it) it's dear old discredited romance that I'm most in sympathy with. I'll send you *The Velvet Glove* to-morrow, if you *can* find half an hour for it ; and then—and *then*—!" She paused as for the positive bright glory of her meaning.

It could only be so extraordinary, her meaning, whatever it was, that the need in him that would—whatever it was again !—meet it most absolutely formed the syllables on his lips as : "Will you be very, *very* kind to me ?"

"Ah, 'kind,' dear Mr. Berridge ? 'Kind,'" she splendidly laughed, "is nothing to what—!" But she pulled herself up again an instant. "Well, to what I want to be ! *Just see*," she said, "how I want to be !" It was exactly, he felt, what he couldn't *but* see—in spite of books and publics and pen-names, in spite of the really "decadent" perversity, recalling that of the most irresponsibly insolent of the old Romans and Byzantines, that could lead a creature so formed for living and breathing her Romance, and so committed, up to the eyes, to the constant fact of her personal immersion in it and genius for it, the dreadful amateurish dance of ungrammatically scribbling it, with editions and advertisements and reviews and royalties and every other futile item : since what was more of the deep essence of throbbing intercourse itself than this very act of her having broken away from people, in the other room, to whom he was as nought, of her having, with her *crânerie* of audacity and indifference, just turned her back on them all as soon as she had begun to miss him ?

What was more of it than her having forbidden them, by a sufficient curt ring of her own supremely silver tone, to attempt to check or criticise her freedom, than her having looked him up, at his distance, under all the noses he had put out of joint, so as to let them think whatever they might—not of herself (much she troubled to care !) but of the new champion to be reckoned with, the invincible young lion of the day ? What was more of it in short than her having perhaps even positively snubbed for him the great mystified Sculptor and the great bewildered Dramatist, treated to this queer experience for the first time of their lives ?

It all came back again to the really great ease of really great ladies, and to the perfect facility of everything when once they were great enough. *That* might become the delicious thing to him, he more and more felt, as soon as it should be supremely attested ; it was ground he had ventured on, scenically, representationally, in the artistic sphere, but without ever dreaming he should “realise” it thus in the social. Handsomely, gallantly just now, moreover, he didn’t so much as let it occur to him that the social experience would perhaps on some future occasion richly profit further scenic efforts ; he only lost himself in the consciousness of all she invited him to believe. It took licence, this consciousness, the next moment, for a tremendous further throb, from what she had gone on to say to him in so many words—though indeed the words were nothing and it was all a matter but of the implication that glimmered through them : “Do you *want* very much your supper here ?” And then while he felt himself glare, for charmed response, almost to the point of his tears rising with it : “Because if you don’t—!”

“Because if I don’t—?” She had paused, not from the faintest shade of timidity, but clearly for the pleasure of making him press.

“Why shouldn’t we go together, letting me drive you home ?”

“You’ll come home with me ?” gasped John Berridge, while the perspiration on his brow might have been the morning dew on a high lawn of Mount Ida.

“No—you had better come with *me*. That’s what I mean ; but I certainly will come to you with pleasure some time if you’ll let me.”

She made no more than that of the most fatuous of freedoms, as he felt directly he had spoken that it might have seemed to her ; and before he had even time to welcome the relief of not having then himself, for beastly contrition, to make more of it, she had simply mentioned, with her affectionate ease, that she wanted to get away, that of the bores there she might easily, after a little, have too much, and that if he’d but say the word they’d

nip straight out together by an independent door and be sure to find her motor in the court. What word he had found to say, he was afterwards to reflect, must have little enough mattered ; for he was to have kept, of what then occurred, but a single other impression, that of her great fragrant rustle beside him over the rest of the ample room and toward their nearest and friendliest resource, the door by which he had come in and which gave directly upon a staircase. This independent image was just that of the only other of his fellow-guests with whom he had been closely concerned ; he had thought of him rather indeed, up to that moment, as the Princess's fellow-Olympian—but a new momentary vision of him seemed now to qualify it.

The young Lord had reappeared within a minute on the threshold, that of the passage from the supper-room, lately crossed by the Princess herself, and Berridge felt him there, saw him there, wondered about him there, all, for the first minute, without so much as a straight look at him. He would have come to learn the reason of his friend's extraordinary public demonstration—having more right to his curiosity, or his anxiety or whatever, than anyone else ; he would be taking in the remarkable appearances that thus completed it, and would perhaps be showing quite a different face for them, at the point they had reached, than any that would have hitherto consorted with the beautiful security of his own position. So much, on our own young man's part, for this first flush of a presumption that he might have stirred the germs of ire in a celestial breast ; so much for the moment during which nothing would have induced him to betray, to a possibly rueful member of an old aristocracy, a vulgar elation or a tickled, unaccustomed glee. His inevitable second thought was, however, it has to be confessed, another matter which took a different turn—for, frankly, all the conscious conqueror in him, as Amy Evans would again have said, couldn't forego a probably supreme consecration. He treated himself to no prolonged reach of vision, but there was something he nevertheless fully measured for five seconds—the sharp truth of the fact, namely, of how the interested observer in the doorway must really have felt about him. Rather disconcertingly, hereupon, the sharp truth proved to be that the most amused, quite the most encouraging and the least invidious of smiles graced the young Lord's handsome countenance—forming, in short, his final contribution to a display of high social candour unprecedented in our hero's experience. No, he wasn't jealous, didn't do John Berridge the honour to be, to the extent of the least glimmer of a spark of it, but was so happy to see his immortal mistress do what

she liked that he could positively beam at the odd circumstance of her almost lavishing public caresses on a gentleman not, after all, of negligible importance.

3

WELL, it was all confounding enough, but this indication in particular would have jostled our friend's grasp of the presented cup had he had, during the next ten minutes, more independence of thought. That, however, was out of the question when one positively felt, as with a pang somewhere deep within, as even with a smothered cry for alarm, one's whole sense of proportion shattered at a blow and ceasing to serve. "Not *straight*, and not too fast, shall we?" was the ineffable young woman's appeal to him, a few minutes later beneath the wide glass porch-cover that sheltered their brief wait for their chariot of fire. It was there even as she spoke; the capped charioteer, with a great clean curve, drew up at the steps of the porch, and the Princess's footman, before rejoining him in front, held open the door of the car. She got in, and Berridge was the next instant beside her; he could only say: "As you like, Princess—where you will; certainly let us prolong it; let us prolong everything; don't let us have it over—strange and beautiful as it can only be!—a moment sooner than we must." So he spoke, in the security of their intimate English, while the perpendicular imperturbable *valet-de-pied*, white-faced in the electric light, closed them in and then took his place on the box where the rigid liveried backs of the two men, presented through the glass, were like a protecting wall; such a guarantee of privacy as might come—it occurred to Berridge's inexpugnable fancy—from a vision of tall guards erect round Eastern seraglios.

His companion had said something, by the time they started, about their taking a turn, their looking out for a few of the night-views of Paris that were so wonderful; and after that, in spite of his constantly-prized sense of knowing his enchanted city and his way about, he ceased to follow or measure their course, content as he was with the particular exquisite assurance it gave him. *That* was knowing Paris, of a wondrous bland April night; that was hanging over it from vague consecrated lamp-studded heights and taking in, spread below and afar, the great scroll of all its irresistible story, pricked out, across river and bridge and radiant *place*, and along quays and boulevards and avenues, and around monumental circles and squares, in syllables of fire, and

sketched and summarised, further and further, in the dim fire-dust of endless avenues ; that was all of the essence of fond and thrilled and throbbing recognition, with a thousand things understood and a flood of response conveyed, a whole familiar possessive feeling appealed to and attested.

"From you, you know, it *would* be such a pleasure, and I think—in fact I'm sure—it would do so much for the thing in America." Had she gone on as they went, or had there been pauses of easy and of charmed and of natural silence, breaks and drops from talk, but only into greater confidence and sweetness ?—such as her very gesture now seemed a part of ; her laying her gloved hand, for emphasis, on the back of his own, which rested on his knee and which took in from the act he scarce knew what melting assurance. The emphasis, it was true—this came to him even while for a minute he held his breath—seemed rather that of Amy Evans ; and if her talk, while they rolled, had been in the sense of these words (he had really but felt that they were shut intimately in together, all his consciousness, all his discrimination of meanings and indications being so deeply and so exquisitely merged in that) the case wasn't as surely and sublimely, as extravagantly, as fabulously romantic for him as his excited pulses had been seeming to certify. Her hand was there on his own, in precious living proof, and splendid Paris hung over them, as a consecrating canopy, her purple night embroidered with gold ; yet he waited, something stranger still having glimmered for him, waited though she left her hand, which expressed emphasis and homage and tenderness, and anything else he liked indeed—since it was all then a matter of what he next heard and what he slowly grew cold as he took from her.

"You know they do it here so charmingly—it's a compliment a clever man is always so glad to pay a literary friend, and sometimes, in the case of a great name like yours, it renders such a service to a poor little book like mine !" She spoke ever so humbly and yet ever so gaily—and still more than before with this confidence of the sincere admirer and the comrade. That, yes, through his sudden sharpening chill, was what first became distinct for him ; she was mentioning somehow her explanation and her conditions—her motive, in fine, disconcerting, deplorable, dreadful, in respect to the experience, otherwise so boundless, that he had taken her as having opened to him ; and she was doing it, above all, with the clearest coolness of her general privilege. What in particular she was talking about he as yet, still holding his breath, wondered ; it was something she wanted him to do for her—which was exactly what he had hoped, but

something of what trivial and, heaven forgive them both, of what dismal order? Most of all, meanwhile, he felt the dire penetration of two or three of the words she had used; so that after a painful minute the quaver with which he repeated them resembled his drawings, slowly, carefully, timidly, some barbed dart out of his flesh.

"A 'literary friend'?" he echoed as he turned his face more to her; so that, as they sat, the whites of her eyes, near to his own, gleamed in the dusk like some silver setting of deep sapphires.

It made her smile—which in their relation now was like the breaking of a cool air-wave over the conscious sore flush that maintained itself through his general chill. "Ah, of course, you don't allow that I *am* literary—and of course if you're awfully cruel and critical and incorruptible you won't let it say for me what I so want it should!"

"Where are we, where, in the name of all that's damnably, of all that's grotesquely delusive, are we?" he said, without a sign, to himself; which was the form of his really being quite at sea as to what she was talking about. That uncertainty indeed he could but frankly betray by taking her up, as he cast about him, on the particular ambiguity that his voice perhaps already showed him to find most irritating. "Let it show? 'It,' dear Princess—?"

"Why, my dear man, let your Preface show, the lovely friendly, irresistible log-rolling Preface that I've been asking you if you wouldn't be an angel and write for me."

He took it in with a deep long gulp—he had never, it seemed to him, had to swallow anything so bitter. "You've been asking me if I wouldn't write you a Preface?"

"To *The Velvet Glove*—after I've sent it to you and you've judged if you really can. Of course I don't want you to perjure yourself; but"—and she fairly brushed him again, at their close quarters, with her fresh fragrant smile—"I do want you so to like me, and to say it all out beautifully and publicly."

"You want me to like you, Princess?"

"But, heaven help us, haven't you understood?"

Nothing stranger could conceivably have been, it struck him—if he was right now—than this exquisite intimacy of her manner of setting him down on the other side of an abyss. It was as if she had lifted him first in her beautiful arms, had raised him up high, high, high, to do it, pressing him to her immortal young breast while he let himself go, and then, by some extraordinary effort of her native force and her alien quality, setting him down exactly where she wanted him to be—which was a thousand miles

away from her. Once more, so preposterously face to face with her for these base issues, he took it all in ; after which he felt his eyes close, for amazement, despair and shame, and his head, which he had some time before, baring his brow to the mild night, eased of its crush-hat, sink to confounded rest on the upholstered back of the seat. The act, the ceasing to see, and if possible to hear, was for the moment a retreat, an escape from a state that he felt himself fairly flattered by thinking it as "awkward" ; the state of really wishing that his humiliation might end, and of wondering in fact if the most decent course open to him mightn't be to ask her to stop the motor and let him down.

He spoke no word for a long minute, or for considerably more than that ; during which time the motor went and went, now even somewhat faster, and he knew, through his closed eyes, that the outer lights had begun to multiply and that they were getting back somewhere into the spacious and decorative quarters. He knew this, and also that his retreat, for all his attitude as of accomodating thought, his air—*that* presently and quickly came to him—of having perhaps gathered himself in, for an instant, at her behest, to turn over, in his high ingenuity, some humbugging "rotten" phrase or formula that he might place at her service and make the note of such an effort ; he became aware, I say, that his lapse was but half-retreat, with her strenuous presence and her earnest pressure and the close, cool respiration of her good faith absolutely timing the moments of his stillness and the progress of the car. Yes, it was wondrous well, he had all but made the biggest of all fools of himself, almost as big a one as *she* was still, to every appearance, in her perfect serenity, trying to make of him, and the one straight answer to it *would* be that he should reach forward and touch the footman's shoulder and demand that the vehicle itself should make an end.

That would be an answer, however, he continued intensely to see, only to inately importunate, to utterly superfluous Amy Evans—not a bit to his at last exquisitely patient companion, who was clearly not quite taking it from him that what kept him in his attitude was the spring of the quick desire to oblige her, the charming loyal impulse to consider a little what he could do for her, say "handsomely yet conscientiously" (oh, the loveliness !) before he should commit himself. She was enchanted—that seemed to breathe upon him ; she waited, she hung there, she quite bent over him, as Diana over the sleeping Endymion, while the conscientious man of letters in him, as she might so supremely have phrased it, struggled with the more peccable, the more muddled and "squared," though, for her own ideal, not

so much more *banal* comrade. Yes, he could keep it up now—that is he could hold out for his real reply, could meet the rather marked tension of the rest of their passage as well as she ; he should be able somehow or other to make his wordless detachment, the tribute of his ostensibly deep consideration of her request, a retreat in good order. She *was*, for herself, to the last point of her guileless fatuity, Amy Evans and an asker for “ lifts,” a conceiver of twaddle both in herself and in him ; or at least, so far as she fell short of all this platitude, it was no fault of the really affecting folly of her attempt to become a mere magazine mortal after the only fashion she had made out, to the intensification of her self-complacency, that she might.

Nothing might thus have touched him more—if to be touched, beyond a certain point, hadn’t been to be squared—than the way she failed to divine the bearing of his thoughts ; so that she had probably at no one small crisis of her life felt so much a promise in the flutter of her own as on the occasion of the beautiful act she indulged in at the very moment, he was afterward to recognise, of their sweeping into her great smooth empty, costly street—a desert, at that hour, of lavish lamplight and sculptured stone. She raised to her lips the hand she had never yet released and kept it there a moment pressed close against them ; he himself closing his eyes to the deepest detachment he was capable of while he took in with a smothered sound of pain that this was the conferred bounty by which Amy Evans sought most expressively to encourage, to sustain and to reward. The motor had slackened and in a moment would stop ; and meanwhile even after lowering his hand again she hadn’t let it go. This enabled it, while he after a further moment roused himself to a more confessed consciousness, to form with his friend’s a more active relation, to possess him of hers, in turn, and with an intention the straighter that her glove had by this time somehow come off. Bending over it without hindrance, he returned as firmly and fully as the application of all his recovered wholeness of feeling, under his moustache, might express, the consecration the bareness of his own knuckles had received ; only after which it was that, still thus drawing out his grasp of her, and having let down their front glass by his free hand, he signified to the footman his view of their stopping short.

They had arrived ; the high, closed *port-cochère*, in its crested stretch of wall, awaited their approach ; but his gesture took effect, the car pulled up at the edge of the pavement, the man, in an instant, was at the door and had opened it ; quickly moving across the walk, the next moment, to press the bell at the gate. Berridge, as his hand now broke away, felt he had cut his cable ;

with which, after he had stepped out, he raised again the glass he had lowered and closed, its own being already down, the door that had released him. During these motions he had the sense of his companion, still radiant and splendid, but somehow momentarily suppressed, suspended, silvered over and celestially blurred, even as a summer moon by the loose veil of a cloud. So it was he saw her while he leaned for farewell on the open window-ledge ; he took her in as her visible intensity of bright vagueness filled the circle that the interior of the car made for her. It was such a state as she would have been reduced to—he felt this, was certain of it—for the first time in her life ; and it was he, poor John Berridge, after all, who would have created the condition.

“ Good-night, Princess. I shan’t see you again.”

Vague was indeed no word for it—shine though she might, in her screened narrow niche, as with the liquefaction of her pearls, the glimmer of her tears, the freshness of her surprise. “ You won’t come in—when you’ve had no supper ? ”

He smiled at her with a purpose of kindness that could never in his life have been greater ; and at first but smiled without a word. He presently shook his head, however—doubtless also with as great a sadness. “ I seem to have supped to my fill, Princess. Thank you, I won’t come in.”

It drew from her, while she looked at him, a long, low, anxious wail. “ And you won’t do my Preface ? ”

“ No, Princess, I won’t do your Preface. Nothing would induce me to say a word in print about you. I’m in fact not sure I shall ever mention you in any manner at all as long as ever I live.”

He had felt for an instant as if he were speaking to some miraculously humanised idol, all sacred, all jewelled, all votively hung about, but made mysterious, in the recess of its shrine, by the very thickness of the accumulated lustre. And “ Then you don’t like me— ? ” was the marvellous sound from the image.

“ Princess,” was in response the sound of the worshipper, “ Princess, I adore you. But I’m ashamed for you.”

“ Ashamed— ? ”

“ You *are* Romance—as everything, and by what I make out every one, about you is ; so what more do you want ? Your Preface—the only one worth speaking of—was written long ages ago by the most beautiful imagination of man.”

Humanised at least for these moments, she could understand enough to declare that she didn’t. “ I don’t, I don’t ! ”

“ You don’t need to understand. Don’t attempt such base things. Leave those to us. Only live. Only be. *We’ll* do the rest.”

She moved over—she had come close to the window. “Ah, but, Mr. Berridge—!”

He raised both hands; he shook them at her gently, in deep and soft deprecation. “Don’t sound my dreadful name. Fortunately, however, you can’t help yourself.”

“Ah, *voyons*! I so want——!”

He repeated his gesture, and when he brought down his hands they closed together on both of hers, which now quite convulsively grasped the window-ledge. “Don’t speak, because when you speak you really say things—! You *are* Romance,” he pronounced afresh and with the last intensity of conviction and persuasion. “That’s all you have to do with it,” he continued while his hands, for emphasis, pressed hard on her own.

Their faces, in this way, were nearer together than ever, but with the effect of only adding to the vividness of that dire non-intelligence from which, all perversely and incalculably, her very beauty now appeared to gain relief. This made for him a pang and almost an anguish; the fear of her saying something yet again that would wretchedly prove how little he moved her perception. So his eyes, of remonstrant, of suppliant intention, met hers close, at the same time that these, so far from shrinking, but with their quite other swimming plea all bedimmed now, seemed almost to wash him with the tears of her failure. He soothed, he stroked, he reassured her hands, for tender conveyance of his meaning, quite as she had just before dealt with his own for brave demonstration of hers. It was during these instants as if the question had been which of them *could* most candidly and fraternally plead. Full but of that she kept it up. “Ah, if you’d only think, if you’d only try——!”

He couldn’t stand it—she was capable of believing he had edged away, excusing himself and trumping up a factitious theory, because he hadn’t the wit, hadn’t the hand, to knock off the few pleasant pages she asked him for and that any proper Frenchman, master of the *métier*, would so easily and gallantly have promised. Should she so begin to commit herself he’d, by the immortal gods, anticipate it in the manner most admirably effective—in fact he’d even thus make her further derogation impossible. Their faces were so close that he could practise any rich freedom—even though for an instant, while the back of the chauffeur guarded them on that side and his own presented breadth, amplified by his loose mantle, filled the whole window-space, leaving him no observation from any quarter to heed, he uttered in a deep-drawn final groan, an irrepressible echo of his pang for what might have been, the muffled cry of his insistence.

THE VELVET GLOVE

"You *are* Romance!"—he drove it intimately, inordinately home, his lips, for a long moment, sealing it, with the fullest force of authority, on her own ; after which, as he broke away and the car, starting again, turned powerfully across the pavement, he had no further sound from her than if, all divinely indulgent but all humanly defeated, she had given the question up, falling back to infinite wonder. He too fell back, but could still wave his hat for her as she passed to disappearance in the great floridly-framed aperture whose wings at once came together behind her.

THE BENCH OF DESOLATION

I

SHE had practically, he believed, conveyed the intimation, the horrid, brutal, vulgar menace, in the course of their last dreadful conversation, when, for whatever was left him of pluck or confidence—confidence in what he would fain have called a little more aggressively the strength of his position—he had judged best not to take it up. But this time there was no question of not understanding, or of pretending he didn't ; the ugly, the awful words, ruthlessly formed by her lips, were like the fingers of a hand that she might have thrust into her pocket for extraction of the monstrous object that would serve best for—what should he call it?—a gage of battle.

“ If I haven't a very different answer from you within the next three days I shall put the matter into the hands of my solicitor, whom it may interest you to know I've already seen. I shall bring an action for 'breach' against you, Herbert Dodd, as sure as my name's Kate Cookham.”

There it was, straight and strong—yet he felt he could say for himself, when once it had come, or even, already just as it was coming, that it turned on, as if she had moved an electric switch, the very brightest light of his own very reasons. There *she* was, in all the grossness of her native indelicacy, in all her essential excess of will and destitution of scruple ; and it was the woman capable of that ignoble threat who, his sharper sense of her quality having become so quite deterrent, was now making for him a crime of it that he shouldn't wish to tie himself to her for life. The vivid, lurid thing was the reality, all unmistakable, of her purpose ; she had thought her case well out ; had measured its odious, specious presentability ; had taken, he might be sure, the very best advice obtainable at Properley, where there was always a first-rate promptitude of everything fourth-rate ; it was disgustingly certain, in short, that she'd proceed. She was sharp and adroit, moreover—distinctly in certain ways a masterhand ; how otherwise, with her so limited mere attractiveness, should she have entangled him ? He couldn't shut eyes to the very probable truth if she should try it she'd pull it off. She *knew* she would—precisely ; and her assurance was thus the very proof of her cruelty. That she had pretended she loved him was

comparatively nothing ; other women had pretended it, and other women too had really done it ; but that she had pretended he could possibly have been right and safe and blest in loving *her*, a creature of the kind who could sniff that squalor of the lawcourt, of claimed damages and brazen lies and published kisses, of love-letters read amid obscene guffaws, as a positive tonic to resentment, as a high incentive to her course—this was what put him so beautifully in the right. It was what might signify in a woman all through, he had said to himself, the mere imagination of such machinery. Truly what a devilish conception and what an appalling nature !

But there was no doubt, luckily, either, that he *could* plant his feet the firmer for his now intensified sense of these things. He was to live, it appeared, abominably worried, he was to live consciously rueful, he was to live perhaps even what a scoffing world would call abjectly exposed ; but at least he was to live saved. In spite of his clutch of which steadying truth, however, and in spite of his declaring to her, with many other angry protests and pleas, that the line of conduct she announced was worthy of a vindictive barmaid, a lurking fear in him, too deep to counsel mere defiance, made him appear to keep open a little, till he could somehow turn round again, the door of a possible composition. He had scoffed at her claim, at a threat, at her thinking she could hustle and bully him—"Such a way, my eye, to call back to life a dead love !"—yet his instinct was ever prudentially but helplessly, for gaining time, even if time only more woefully to quake ; and gained it now by not absolutely giving for his ultimatum that he wouldn't think of coming round. He didn't in the smallest degree mean to come round, but it was characteristic of him that he could for three or four days breathe a little easier by having left her under the impression that he perhaps might. At the same time he couldn't have said—what had conduced to bring out, in retort, her own last word, the word on which they had parted—"Do you mean to say you yourself would now be *willing* to marry and live with a man of whom *you* could feel, the thing done, that he'd be all the while thinking of you in the light of a hideous coercion ?" "Never you mind about my willingness," Kate had answered ; "you've known what that has been for the last six months. Leave that to me, my willingness—I'll take care of it all right ; and just see what conclusion you can come to about your own."

He was to remember afterward how he had wondered whether, turned upon her in silence while her odious lucidity reigned unchecked, his face had shown her anything like the quantity

of hate he felt. Probably not at all ; no man's face *could* express that immense amount ; especially the fair, refined, intellectual, gentleman-like face which had had—and by her own more than once repeated avowal—so much to do with the enormous fancy she had originally taken to him. “ Which—frankly now—would you personally *rather* I should do,” he had at any rate asked her with an intention of supreme irony : “ just sordidly marry you on top of this, or leave you the pleasure of your lovely appearance in court and of your so assured (since that's how you feel it) big haul of damages ? Shan't you be awfully disappointed, in fact, if I don't let you get something better out of me than a poor plain ten-shilling gold ring and the rest of the blasphemous rubbish, as we should make it between us, pronounced at the altar ? I take it of course,” he had swaggered on, “ that your pretension wouldn't be for a moment that I should—after the act of profanity—take up my life with you.”

“ It's just as much my dream as ever it was, Herbert Dodd, to take up mine with *you* ! Remember for me that I can do with it, my dear, that my idea is for even as much as that of you ! ” she had cried ; “ remember that for me, Herbert Dodd ; remember, remember ! ”

It was on this she had left him frankly under a mortal chill. There might have been a last ring of an appeal or a show of persistent and perverse tenderness in it, however preposterous any such matter ; but in point of fact her large, clean, plain brown face—so much too big for her head, he now more than ever felt it to be, just as her head was so much too big for her body, and just as her hats had an irritating way of appearing to decline choice and conformity in respect to *any* of her dimensions—presented itself with about as much expression as his own shop-window when the broad, blank, sallow blind was down. He was fond of his shop-window with some good show on ; he had a fancy for a good show and was master of twenty different schemes of taking arrangements for the old books and prints, “ high class rarities ” his modest catalogue called them, in which he dealt and which his maternal uncle, David Geddes, had, as he liked to say, “ handed down ” to him. His widowed mother had screwed the whole thing, the stock and the connection and the rather bad little house in the rather bad little street, out of the ancient worthy, shortly before his death, in the name of the youngest and most interesting, the “ delicate ” one and the literary of her five scattered and struggling children. He could enjoy his happiest collocation and contrasts and effects, his harmonics and varieties of tones and faded leather and cloth, his

sought colour notes and the high clearnesses, here and there, of his white and beautifully figured price labels, which pleased him enough in themselves almost to console him for not oftener having to break, on a customer's insistence, into the balanced composition. But the dropped expanse of time-soiled canvas, the thing of Sundays and holidays, with just his name, "Herbert Dodd, Successor," painted on below his uncle's antique style, the feeble pen-like flourishes already quite archaic—this ugly vacant mask which might so easily be taken for the mask of failure, somehow always gave him a chill.

That had been just the sort of chill—the analogy was complete—of Kate Cookham's last look. He supposed people doing an awfully good and sure and steady business in whatever line could see a whole front turned to vacancy that way, and merely think of the hours off represented by it. Only for this—nervously to bear it, in other words, and Herbert Dodd, quite with the literary temperament himself, was capable of that amount of play of fancy, or even of morbid analysis—you had to be on some footing, you had to feel some confidence, pretty different to his own up till now. He had never *not* enjoyed passing his show on the other side of the street and taking it in thence with a casual obliquity ; but he had never held optical commerce with the drawn blind for a moment longer than he could help. It *always* looked horribly final and as if it never would come up again. Big and bare, with his name staring at him from the middle, it thus offered in its grimness a term of comparison for Miss Cookham's ominous visage. She never wore pretty, dotty, transparent veils, as Nan Drury did, and the words "Herbert Dodd"—save that she had sounded them at him there two or three times more like a Meg Merrilies or the bold bad woman in one of the melodramas of high life given during the fine season in the pavilion at the end of the Properley Pier—were dreadfully, were permanently seated on her lips. *She* was grim, no mistake.

That evening, alone in the back room above the shop, he saw so little that he could do that, consciously demoralised for the hour, he gave way to tears about it. Her taking a stand so incredibly "low," that was what he couldn't get over. The particular bitterness of his cup was having let himself in for a struggle on such terms—the use, on her side, of the vulgarst process known to the law : the vulgarest, the vulgarest, he kept repeating that, clinging to the help rendered him by his imputation to his terrorist of the vice he sincerely believed he had ever, among difficulties (for oh, he recognised the difficulties !), sought to keep most alien to him. He knew what he was, in a dismal

down-trodden sphere enough—the lean young proprietor of an old business that had itself rather shrivelled with age than ever grown fat, the purchase and the sale of second-hand books and prints, with the back-street of a long-fronted south coast watering-place (Old Town by good luck) for the dusky field of his life. But he had gone in for all the education he could get—his educated customers would often hang about for more talk by the half-hour at a time, he actually feeling himself, and almost with a scruple hold them there ; which meant that he had had (he couldn't be blind to that) natural taste and had lovingly cultivated and formed it. Thus from as far back as he could remember, there had been things all round him that he had suffered from when other people didn't ; and he had kept most of his suffering to himself—which had taught him, in a manner, *how* to suffer, and how almost to like to.

So, at any rate, he had never let go his sense of certain differences, he had done everything he could to keep it up—whereby everything that was vulgar was on the wrong side of his line. He had believed, for a series of strange, oppressed months, that Kate Cookham's manners and tone were on the right side ; she had been governess—for young children—in two very good private families, and now had classes in literature and history for bigger girls who were sometimes brought in by their mammas ; in fact, coming in one day to look over his collection of students' manuals, and drawing it out, as so many did, for the evident sake of his conversation, she had appealed to him that very first time by her apparently pronounced intellectual side—goodness knew she didn't even then by the physical !—which she had artfully kept in view till she had entangled him past undoing. And it had all been but the cheapest of traps—when he came to take the pieces apart a bit—laid over a brazen avidity. What he now collapsed for, none the less—what he sank down on a chair at a table and nursed his weak, scared sobs in his resting arms for—was the fact that, whatever the trap, it held him as with the grip of sharp, murderous steel. There he was ; there he was ; alone in the brown summer dusk—brown through *his* windows—he cried and cried. He shouldn't get out without losing a limb. The only question was which of his limbs it should be.

Before he went out, later on—for he at last felt the need to—he could, however, but seek to remove from his face and his betraying eyes, over his washstand, the traces of his want of fortitude. He brushed himself up ; with which, catching his stricken image a bit spectrally in an old dim toilet-glass, he knew again, in a flash, the glow of righteous resentment. Who should

be assured against coarse usage if a man of his really elegant, perhaps in fact a trifle over-refined or "effete" appearance, his absolutely gentlemanlike type, couldn't be? He never went so far as to rate himself, with exaggeration, a gentleman; but he would have maintained against all comers, with perfect candour and as claiming a high advantage, that he was, in spite of that liability to blubber, "like" one; which he was no doubt, for that matter, at several points. Like what lady then, who could ever possibly have been taken for one, was Kate Cookham, and therefore how could one have anything of the intimate and private order—out with her fairly and on the plane, the only possible one, of common equality? He might find himself crippled for life; he believed verily, the more he thought, that that was what was before him. But he ended by seeing this doom in the almost redeeming light of the fact that it would all have been because he was, comparatively, too aristocratic. Yes, a man in his station couldn't afford to carry that so far—it must sooner or later, in one way or the other, spell ruin. Never mind—it was the only thing he could be. Of course he should exquisitely suffer—but when hadn't he exquisitely suffered? How was he going to get through life by *any* arrangement without that? No wonder any woman such as Kate Cookham had been so keen to annex so rare a value. The right thing would have been that the highest price should be paid for it—by such a different sort of logic from this nightmare of *his* having to pay.

2

WHICH was the way, of course, he talked to Nan Drury—as he had felt the immediate wild need to; for he should perhaps be able to bear it all somehow or other with *her*—while they sat together when time and freedom served, on one of the very last, the far westward benches of the interminable sea-front. It wasn't everyone who walked so far, especially at that flat season—the only ghost of a bustle now, save for the gregarious, the obstreperous haunters of the fluttering, far-shining Pier, being reserved for the sunny Parade of mid-winter. It wasn't every one who cared for the sunsets (which you got awfully well from there) and which were a particularly strong point of the lower, the more "sympathetic" as Herbert Dodd liked to call it, Properley horizon—as he had always intensely cared, and as he had found Nan Drury care; to say nothing of his having also observed how little they directly spoke to Miss Cookham. He had taught this

oppressive companion to notice them a bit, as he had taught her plenty of other things, but that was a different matter ; for the reason that the "land's end" (stretching a point if it carried off that name) had been, and had had to be by their lack of more sequestered resorts and conveniences, the scene of so much of what he styled their wooing time—or, to put it more properly, of the time during which she had made the straightest and most unabashed love to *him* : just as it could henceforth but render possible, under an equal rigour, that he should enjoy these periods of consolation from beautiful, gentle, tender-souled Nan, to whom he was now at last, after the wonderful way they had helped each other to behave, going to make love, absolutely unreserved and abandoned, absolutely reckless and romantic love, a refuge from poisonous reality, as hard as ever he might.

The league-long, paved, lighted, garden-plotted, seated and refuged Marina renounced its more or less celebrated attractions to break off short here ; and an inward curve of the kindly westward shore almost made a wide-armed bay, with all the ugliness between town and country, and the further casual fringe of the coast, turning, as the day waned, to rich afternoon blooms of grey and brown and distant—it might fairly have been beautiful Hampshire—blue. Here it was that all the blighted summer, with Nan—from the dreadful May-day on—he gave himself up to the reaction of intimacy with the *kind* of woman, at least, that he liked ; even if of everything else that might make life possible he was to be, by what he could make out, for ever starved. Here it was that—as well as whatever other scraps of occasions they could manage—Nan began to take off and fold up and put away in her pocket her pretty, dotty, becoming veil ; as under the logic of his having so tremendously ceased, in the shake of his dark storm gust, to be engaged to another woman. Her removal of that trusted obstacle to a trusted friend's assuring himself whether the peach-like bloom of her finer facial curves bore the test of much further inquiry into their cool sweetness as might reinforce a mere baffled gaze—her momentous, complete surrender of so much of her charm, let us say, both marked the change in the situation of the pair and established the record of their perfect observance of every propriety for so long before. They afterward, in fact could have dated it, their full clutch of their freedom and the bliss of their having so little henceforth to consider save their impotence, their poverty, their ruin ; dated it from the hour of his recital to her of the—at the first blush—quite appalling upshot of his second and conclusive "scene of violence" with the mistress of his fortune, when the dire terms of his release had

had to be formally, and oh ! so abjectly, acceded to. She "compromised," the cruel brute, for Four Hundred Pounds down—for not a farthing less would she stay her strength from the "proceedings." No jury in the land but would give her six on the nail. ("Oh, she knew quite where she was, thank you!") and he might feel lucky to get off with a whole skin. This was the sum, then, for which she had grovellingly compounded—under an agreement sealed by a supreme exchange of remarks.

"Where in the name of lifelong ruin are you to find Four Hundred?" Miss Cookham had mockingly repeated after him while he gasped as from the grip on his collar. "That's *your* lookout and I should have thought you'd have made sure you knew before you decided on your base perfidy." And then she mouthed and minced with ever so false a gentility, her consistent, her sickening conclusion. "Of course—I may mention again—if you too distinctly object to the trouble of looking, you know where to find *me*."

"I had rather starve to death than ever go within half a mile of you!" Herbert described himself as having sweetly answered; and that was accordingly where *they* devotedly but desperately were—he and she, penniless Nan Drury. Her father, of Drury & Dean, was like so far too many of the other of the anxious characters who peered through the dull window glass of dusty offices at Properley, an Estate and House Agent, Surveyor, Valuer and Auctioneer; she was the prettiest of six, with two brothers, neither of them the least use, but, thanks to the manner in which their main natural protector appeared to languish under the accumulation of his attributes, they couldn't be said very particularly or positively to live. Their continued collective existence was a good deal of a miracle even to themselves though they had fallen into the way of not unnecessarily, or too nervously, exchanging remarks upon it, and had even in a sort, from year to year, got used to it. Nan's brooding pinkness when he talked to her, her so very parted lips, considering her pretty teeth, her so very parted eyelids, considering her pretty eyes, all of which might have been those of some waxen image of uncritical faith cooled the heat of his helplessness very much as if he were laying his head on a tense silk pillow. She had it was true, forms of speech, familiar watchwords, that affected him as small scratchy perforations of the smooth surface from within; but his pleasure in her and need of her were independent of such things and really almost together determined by the fact of the happy, even if all so lonely, forms and instincts in her which claimed kinship with his own. With her natural elegance stamped on her as by a die,

with her dim and disinherited individual refinement of grace, which would have made any one wonder who she was anywhere—hat and veil and feather-boas and smart umbrella-knob and all—with her regular God-given distinction of type, in fine, she couldn't abide vulgarity much more than he could.

Therefore it didn't seem to him, under his stress, to matter particularly, for instance, if she *would* keep on referring so many things to the time, as she called it, when she came into his life—his own great insistence and contention being that she hadn't in the least entered there until his mind was wholly made up to eliminate his other friend. What that methodical fury was so fierce to bring home to him was the falsity to herself involved in the later acquaintance; whereas just his precious right to hold up his head to everything—before himself at least—sprang from the fact that she couldn't make dates fit anyhow. He hadn't so much as heard of his true beauty's existence (she had come back a few weeks before from her two years with her terrible trying deceased aunt at Swindon, previous to which absence she had been an unnoticeable chit) till days and days, ever so many, upon his honour, after he had struck for freedom by his first great backing-out letter—the precious document, the treat for a British jury, in which, by itself, Miss Cookham's firm instructed her to recognise the prospect of a fortune. The way the ruffians had been “her” ruffians—it appeared as if she had posted them behind her from the first of her beginning her game!—and the way “instructions” bounced out, with it, at a touch, larger than life, as if she had arrived with her pocket full of them! The date of the letter, taken with its other connections, and the date of *her* first give-away for himself, his seeing her get out of the Brighton train with Bill Frankle that day he had gone to make the row at the Station parcels office about the miscarriage of the box from Wales—those were the facts it sufficed him to point to, as he had pointed to them for Nan Drury's benefit, goodness knew, often and often enough. If he didn't seek occasion to do so for anyone else's—in open court as they said—that was his own affair, or at least his and Nan's.

It little mattered, meanwhile, if on their bench of desolation all that summer—and, it may be added, for summers and summers, to say nothing of winters, there and elsewhere, to come—she did give way to her artless habit of not contradicting him enough, which led to her often trailing up and down before him, too complacently, the untimely shreds and patches of his own glooms and desperations. “Well, I'm glad I am in your life, terrible as it is, however and whenever I did come in!” and “*Of course*

you'd rather have starved—and it seems pretty well as if we shall, doesn't it?—than have bought her off by a false, abhorrent love, wouldn't you?" and "It isn't as if she hadn't made up to you the way she did before you had so much as looked at her, is it? or as if you hadn't shown her what you felt her really to be before you had so much as looked at me, is it either?" and "Yes, how on earth, pawning the shoes on your feet, you're going to raise another shilling—*that's* what you want to know, poor darling, don't you?"

3

His creditor, at the hour it suited her, transferred her base of operations to town, to which impenetrable scene she had also herself retired; and his raising of the first Two Hundred, during five exasperating and miserable months, and then of another Seventy piece-meal, bleedingly, after long delays and under the epistolary whiplash cracked by the London solicitor in his wretched car even to an effect of the very report of Miss Cookham's tongue—these melancholy efforts formed a scramble up an arduous steep where steps were planted and missed, and bared knees were excoriated, and clutches at wayside tufts succeeded and failed, on a system to which poor Nan could have intelligently entered only if she had been somehow less lady-like. She kept putting into his mouth the sick quaver of where he should find the always inextinguishable rest, long after he had in silent rage fallen away from any further payment at all—at first, he had but too blackly felt for himself, to the still quite possible non-exclusion of some penetrating ray of "exposure." He didn't care a tuppenny damn now, and in point of fact, after he had by hook and by crook succeeded in being able to unload to the tune of Two-Hundred-and-Seventy, and then simply returned the newest reminder of this outstanding obligation unopened, this later belated but real sign of fight, the first he had risked, remarkably caused nothing at all to happen; nothing at least but his being moved to quite tragically rueful wonder as to whether exactly some such demonstration mightn't have served his turn at an earlier stage.

He could by this time at any rate measure his ruin—with three fantastic mortgages on his house, his shop, his stock, and a burden of interest to carry under which his business simply stretched itself inanimate, without strength for a protesting kick, without breath for an appealing groan. Customers lingering for further enjoyment

of the tasteful remarks he had cultivated the unobtrusive art of throwing in, would at this crisis have found plenty to repay them, might his wit have strayed a little more wildly still, towards a circuitous egotistical outbreak, from the immediate question of the merits of this and that author or of the condition of this and that volume. He had come to be conscious through it all of strangely glaring at people when they tried to haggle—and not, as formerly, with the glare of derisive comment on their overdone humour, but with that of fairly idiotised surrender ; as if they were much mistaken in supposing, for the sake of conversation, that he might take himself for saveable by the difference between sevenpence and ninepence. He watched every thing impossible and deplorable happen, as in an endless prolongation of his nightmare ; watched himself proceed that is, with the finest, richest incoherence to the due preparation of his catastrophe. Everything came to seem *equally* part of this—in complete defiance of proportion ; even his final command of detachment, on the bench of desolation (where each successive fact of his dire case regularly cut itself out black, yet of senseless silhouette, against the red west), in respect to poor Nan's flat infelicities, which for the most part kept no pace with the years or with change, but only shook like hard peas in a child's rattle, the same peas always of course, so long as the rattle didn't split open with usage or from somebody's act of irritation. They represented, or they had long done so, her contribution to the more superficial of the two branches of intimacy—the intellectual alternative, the one that didn't merely consist in her preparing herself for his putting his arm round her waist.

There were to have been moments, nevertheless, all the first couple of years, when she did touch in him, though to his actively dissimulating it a more or less sensitive nerve—moments as they were too, to do her justice, when she treated him not to his own wisdom, or even folly, served up cold, but to a certain small bitter fruit of her personal, her unnatural, plucking. "I wonder that since *she* took legal advice so freely, to come down on you, you didn't take it yourself, a little, before being so sure you stood no chance. Perhaps *your* people would have been sure of something quite different—*perhaps*, I only say, you know." She "only" said it, but she said it, none the less, in the early time, about once a fortnight. In the later, and especially after their marriage, it had a way of coming up again to the exclusion, as it seemed to him, of almost everything else ; in fact, during the most dismal years, the three of the loss of their two children, the long stretch of sordid embarrassment ending in her death, he was afterwards

to think of her as having generally said it several times a day. He was then also to remember that his answer, before she had learnt to discount it, had been inveterately at hand : " What would any solicitor have done or wanted to do but drag me into the hideous public arena "—he had always so put it—" that it has been at any rate my pride and my honour, the one rag of self-respect covering my nakedness, to have loathed and avoided from every point of view ? "

That had disposed of it so long as he cared, and by that time he had ceased to care for anything it had also lost itself in the rest of the vain babble of home. After his wife's death, during his year of mortal solitude, it woke again as an echo of far-off things—far-off, very far-off—because he felt then not ten but twenty years older. That was by reason simply of the dead weight with which his load of debt had settled—the persistence of his misery dragging itself out. With all that had come and gone the bench of desolation was still there, just as the immortal flush of the westward sky kept hanging its indestructible curtain. He had never got away—everything had left him, but he himself had been able to turn his back on nothing—and now, his day's labour before a dirty desk at the Gas Works ended, he more often than not, almost any season at temperate Properley serving his turn, took his slow, straight way to the land's end and, collapsing there to rest, sat often for an hour at a time staring before him. He might in these sessions, with his eyes on the grey-green sea, have been counting again and still recounting the beads, almost all worn smooth, of his rosary of pain—which had for the fingers of memory and the recurrences of wonder the same felt break of the smaller ones by the larger that would have aided a pious mumble in some dusky altar-chapel.

If it had been said of him that when once full submersion, as from far back, had visibly begun to await him, he watched himself, in a cold lucidity, do punctually and necessarily each of the deplorable things that were inconsistent with his keeping afloat, so at present again he might have been held agaze just by the presented grotesqueness of that vigil. Such ghosts of dead seasons were all he *had* now to watch—such a recaptured sense, for instance, as that of the dismal unavailing awareness that had attended his act of marriage. He had let submersion final and absolute become the signal for it—a mere minor determinant having been the more or less contemporaneously unfavourable effect on the business of Drury & Dean of the sudden disappearance of Mr. Dean with the single small tin box into which the certificate of the firm's credit had been found to be com-

pressible. That had been his only form—or had at any rate seemed his only one. He couldn't not have married, no doubt, just as he couldn't not have suffered the last degree of humiliation and almost of want, or just as his wife and children couldn't not have died of the little he was able, under dire reiterated pinches, to do for them ; but it was "rum," for final solitary brooding, that he hadn't appeared to see his way definitely to undertake the support of a family till the last scrap of his little low-browed, high-toned business and the last figment of "property" in the old tiled and timbered shell that housed it had been sacrificed to creditors mustering six rows deep.

Of course what had counted too in the odd order was that, even at the end of the two or three years he had "allowed" her, Kate Cookham, gorged with his unholy tribute, had become the subject of no successful siege on the part either of Bill Frankle or, by what he could make out, of anyone else. She had judged decent—he could do her that justice—to take herself personally out of his world, as he called it, for good and all, as soon as he had begun regularly to bleed ; and, to whatever lucrative practice she might be devoting her great talents in London or elsewhere, he felt his conscious curiosity about her as cold, with time, as the passion of vain protests that she had originally left him to. He could recall but two direct echoes of her in all the bitter years—both communicated by Bill Frankle, disappointed and exposed and at last quite remarkably ingenuous sneak, who had also, from far back, taken to roaming the world, but who, during a period, used fitfully and ruefully to reappear. Herbert Dodd had quickly seen, at their first meeting—every one meets every one sooner or later at Properley, if meeting it could always be called, either in the glare or the gloom of the explodedly attractive Embankment—that no silver stream of which he himself had been the remoter source could have played over the career of this all but repudiated acquaintance. That hadn't fitted with his first, his quite primitive raw vision of the probabilities, and he had further been puzzled when, much later on, it had come to him in a roundabout way that Miss Cookham was supposed to be, or to have been, among them for a few days "on the quiet," and that Frankle, who had seen her and who claimed to know more about it than he said, was cited as authority for the fact. But he hadn't himself at this juncture seen Frankle ; he had only wondered, and a degree of mystification had even remained.

That memory referred itself to the dark days of old Drury's smash, the few weeks between his partner's dastardly flight and

Herbert's own comment on it in the form of his standing up with Nan for the nuptial benediction of the Vicar of St. Bernard's on a very cold, bleak December morning and amid a circle of seven or eight long-faced, red-nosed, and altogether dowdy persons. Poor Nan herself had come to affect him as scarce other than red-nosed and dowdy by that time, but this only added, in his then, and indeed to his lasting view, to his general and his particular morbid bravery. He had cultivated ignorance, there were small inward immaterial luxuries he could scrappily cherish even among other, and the harshest, destitutions ; and one of them was represented by this easy refusal of his mind to render to certain passages of his experience, to various ugly images, names, associations, the homage of continued attention. That served him, that helped him ; but what happened when, a dozen dismal years having worn themselves away, he sat single and scraped bare again, as if his long wave of misfortune had washed him far beyond everything and then conspicuously retreated, was that, thus stranded by tidal action, deposited in the lonely hollow of his fate, he felt even sustaining pride turn to nought and heard no challenge from it when old mystifications, stealing forth in the dusk of the day's work done, scratched at the door of speculation and hung about, through the idle hours, for irritated notice.

The evenings of his squalid clerkship were all leisure now, but there was nothing at all near home, on the other hand, for his imagination, numb and stiff from its long chill, to begin to play with. Voices from far off would quaver to him therefore in the stillness ; where he knew for the most recurrent, little by little, the faint wail of his wife. He had become deaf to it in life, but at present, after so great an interval, he listened again, listened and listened, and seemed to hear it sound as by the pressure of some weak broken spring. It phrased for his ear her perpetual question, the one she had come to at the last as under the obsession of a discovered and resented wrong, a wrong withal that had its source much more in his own action than anywhere else. "That you didn't make *sure* she could have done anything, that you didn't make sure and that you were too afraid !"—this commemoration had ended by playing such a part of Nan's finally quite contracted consciousness as to exclude everything else.

At the time, somehow, he had made his terms with it ; he had then more urgent questions to meet than that of the poor creature's taste in worrying pain ; but actually it struck him—not the question, but the fact itself of the taste—as the one thing left over from all that had come and gone. So it was ; nothing remained

to him in the world, on the bench of desolation, but the option of taking up that echo—together with an abundance of free time for doing so. That he hadn't made sure of what might or what mightn't have been done to him, that he had been too afraid—had the proposition a possible bearing on his present apprehension of things? To reply indeed he would have had to be able to say what his present apprehension of things, left to itself, amounted to; an uninspiring effort indeed he judged it sunk to so poor a pitch was his material of thought—though it might at last have been the feat he sought to perform as he stared at the grey-green

4

It was seldom he was disturbed in any form of sequestered speculation, or that at his times of predilection, especially that of the long autumn blankness between the season of trippers and the season of bath-chairs, there were westward stragglers enough to jar upon his settled sense of priority. For himself his seat, the term of his walk, was consecrated; it had figured to him for years as the last (though there were others, not immediately near it, and differently disposed, that might have aspired to the title); so that he could invidiously distinguish as he approached, make out from a distance any accident of occupation, and never draw nearer while that unpleasantness lasted. What he disliked was to compromise on his tradition, whether for a man, a woman, or a canoodling couple; it was to idiots of this last composition he most objected, he having sat there, in the past, alone, having sat there interminably with Nan, having sat there with—well, with other women when women, at hours of ease, could still care or count for him, but having never shared the place with any shuffling or snuffling strangers.

It was a world of fidgets and starts, however, the world of his present dreariness; he alone possessed in it, he seemed to make out, of the secret of the dignity of sitting still with one's fate; so that if he took a turn about or rested briefly elsewhere even foolish philanderers—though this would never have been his and Nan's way—ended soon by some adjournment as visibly pointless as their sprawl. Then, their backs turned, he would drop down on it, the bench of desolation—which was what he, and he only, made it, by sad adoption; where, for that matter, moreover, once he had settled at his end, it was marked that nobody else came to sit. He saw people, along the Marina, take this liberty

THE BENCH OF DESOLATION

with other resting presences ; but his own struck them perhaps in general as either of too grim or just of too dingy a vicinage. He might have affected the fellow-lounger as a man evil, unsociable, possibly engaged in working out the idea of crime ; or otherwise, more probably—for on the whole he surely looked harmless—devoted to the worship of some absolutely unpractical remorse.

On a certain October Saturday he had got off as usual, early ; but the afternoon light, his pilgrimage drawing to its aim, could still show him, at long range, the rare case of an established usurper. His impulse was then, as by custom, to deviate a little and wait, all the more that the occupant of the bench was a lady, and that ladies, when alone, were—at that austere end of the varied frontal stretch—markedly discontinuous ; but he kept on at sight of this person's rising, while he was still fifty yards off, and proceeding, her back turned, to the edge of the broad terrace, the outer line of which followed the interspaced succession of seats and was guarded by an iron rail from the abruptly lower level of the beach. Here she stood before the sea, while our friend on his side, recognising no reason to the contrary, sank into the place she had quitted. There were other benches, eastward and off by the course of the drive, for vague ladies. The lady indeed thrust upon Herbert's vision might have struck an observer either as not quite vague or as vague with a perverse intensity suggesting design.

Not that our own observer at once thought of these things ; he only took in, and with no great interest, that the obtruded presence was a " real " lady ; that she was dressed—he noticed such matters—with a certain elegance of propriety or intention of harmony ; and that she remained perfectly still for a good many minutes ; so many, in fact, that he presently ceased to heed her, and that as she wasn't straight before him, but as far to the left as was consistent with his missing her profile, he had turned himself to one of his sunsets again (though it wasn't quite one of his best) and let it hold him for a time that enabled her to alter her attitude and present a fuller view. Without other movement, but her back now to the sea and her face to the odd person who had appropriated her corner, she had taken a sustained look at him before he was aware she had stirred. On that apprehension, however, he became also promptly aware of her direct, her applied observation. As his sense of this quickly increased he wondered who she was and what she wanted—what, as it were, was the matter with her ; it suggested to him the next thing, that she had, under some strange idea, actually been waiting

THE BENCH OF DESOLATION

for him. Any idea about him to-day on the part of any one could only be strange.

Yes, she stood there with the ample width of the Marina between them, but turned to him, for all the world, as to show frankly that she was concerned with him. And she *was*—oh, yes—a real lady : a middle-aged person, of good appearance and of the best condition, in quiet but “handsome” black save for very fresh white kid gloves, and with a pretty, dotty, becoming veil, predominantly white, adjusted to her countenance ; which through it somehow, even to his imperfect sight, showed strong fine black brows and what he would have called on the spot character. But she was pale ; her black brows were the blacker behind the flattering tissue ; she still kept a hand, for support on the terrace-rail, while the other, at the end of an extended arm that had an effect of rigidity, clearly pressed hard on the knob of a small and shining umbrella, the lower extremity of whose stick was equally, was sustainingly, firm on the walk. So this mature, qualified, important person stood and looked at the limp undistinguished—oh, his values of aspect now !—shabby man on the bench.

It was extraordinary, but the fact of her interest, by immensely surprising, by immediately agitating him, blinded him at first to her identity and, for the space of his long stare, diverted him from it ; with which even then, when recognition did break, the sense of the shock, striking inward, simply consumed itself in gaping stillness. He sat there motionless and weak, fairly faint with surprise, and there was no instant, in all the succession of so many, at which Kate Cookham could have caught the special sign of his intelligence. Yet that she did catch something he saw—for he saw her steady herself, by her two supported hands, to meet it ; while, after she had done so, a very wonderful thing happened, of which he could scarce, later on, have made a clear statement, though he was to think it over again and again. She moved toward him, she reached him, she stood there, she sat down near him, he merely passive and wonderstruck, unresentfully “impressed,” gaping and taking it in—and all as with an open allowance on the part of each, so that they positively and quite intimately met in it, of the impertinence for their case, this case that brought them again, after horrible years, face to face, of the vanity, the profanity, the impossibility, of anything between them but silence.

Nearer to him, beside him at a considerable interval (she was immensely considerate !) she presented him, in the sharp terms of her transformed state—but thus the more amply, formally,

ceremoniously—with the reasons that would serve him best for not having precipitately known her. She was simply another and a totally different person, and the exhibition of it to which she had proceeded with this solemn anxiety was all, obviously, for his benefit—once he had, as he appeared to be doing, provisionally accepted her approach. He had remembered her as inclined to the massive and disowned by the graceful ; but this was a spare, fine, worn almost wasted lady—who had repaired waste, it was true, however, with something he could only appreciate as a rich accumulation of manner. She was strangely older, so far as that went—marked by experience and as if many things had happened to her ; her face had suffered, to its improvement, contraction and concentration ; and if he had granted, of old and from the first that her eyes were remarkable, had they yet ever had for him this sombre glow ? Withal something said she had flourished—he felt it, wincing at it, as that ; she had had a life, a career, a history, something that her present waiting air and nervous consciousness couldn't prevent his noting there as deeply latent assurance. She had flourished, she had flourished—though to learn it after this fashion was somehow at the same time not to feel she flaunted it. It wasn't this execration that she revived in him ; she made in fact, exhibitively, as he could only have put it, the matter of long ago irrelevant, and these extraordinary minutes of their reconstituted relation—how many ? how few ?—addressed themselves altogether to new possibilities.

Still it after a little awoke in him as with the throb of a touched nerve that his own very attitude was supplying a connection ; he knew presently that he wouldn't have had her go, *couldn't* have made a sign to her for it—which was what she had been uncertain of—without speaking to him ; and that therefore he was, as at the other, the hideous time, passive to whatever she might do. She was even yet, she was always in possession of him ; she had known how and where to find him and had appointed that he should see her, and, though he had never dreamed it was again to happen to him, he was meeting it already as if it might have been the only thing that the least humanly *could*. Yes, he had come back there to flop, by long custom upon the bench of desolation as the man in the whole place, precisely, to whom nothing worth more than tuppence could happen : whereupon in the grey desert of his consciousness, the very earth had suddenly opened and flamed. With this, further, it came over him that he hadn't been prepared and that his wretched appearance must show it. He wasn't fit to receive a visit—any visit ; a flush for his felt misery, in the light of her opulence, broke out in his lean

checks. But if he coloured he sat as he was—she should at least, as a visitor, be satisfied. His eyes only, at last, turned from her and resumed a little their gaze at the sea. That however didn't relieve him, and he perpetrated in the course of another moment the odd desperate gesture of raising both his hands to his face and letting them, while he pressed it to them, cover and guard it. It was as he held them there that she at last spoke.

"I'll go away if you wish me to." And then she waited a moment. "I mean now, now that you've seen I'm here. I wanted you to know it, and I thought of writing—I was afraid of our meeting accidentally. Then I was afraid that if I wrote you might refuse. So I thought of this way—as I knew you must come out here." She went on with pauses, giving him a chance to make a sign. "I've waited several days. But I'll do what you wish. Only I should like in that case to come back." Again she stopped ; but strange was it to him that he wouldn't have made her break off. She held him in boundless wonder. "I came down—I mean I came from town—on purpose. I'm staying on still, and I've a great patience and will give you time. Only may I say it's important ? Now that I do see you," she brought out in the same way, "I see how inevitable it was—I mean that I should have wanted to come. But you must feel about it as you can," she wound up—"till you get used to the idea."

She spoke so for accommodation, for discretion, for some ulterior view already expressed in her manner, that, after taking well in, from behind his hands, that this was her very voice—oh, lady-like !—heard, and heard in deprecation of displeasure, after long years again, he uncovered his face and freshly met her eyes. More than ever he couldn't have known her. Less and less remained of the figure all the facts of which had long ago so hardened for him. She was a handsome, grave, authoritative, but refined and, as it were, physically rearranged person—she, the outrageous vulgarity of whose prime assault had kept him shuddering so long as a shudder was in him. That atrocity in her was what everything had been built on, all strangely, it was slipping from him ; so that, after the oddest fashion conceivable, when he felt he mustn't let her go, it was as if he were putting out a hand to save the past, the hideous, real, unalterable past, exactly as she had been the cause of its being and the cause of his undergoing it. He should have been too awfully "sold" if he wasn't going to have been right about her.

"I don't mind," he heard himself at last say. Not to mind had seemed for the instant the length he was prepared to go ; but he was afterward aware of how soon he must have added ; "You've

come on purpose to see me ? ” He was on the point of putting to her further : “ What then do you want of me ? ” But he would keep—yes, in time—from appearing to show he cared. If he showed he cared, where then would be his revenge ? So he was already, within five minutes, thinking his revenge uncomfortably over instead of just comfortably knowing it. What came to him, at any rate, as they actually fell to talk, was that, with such precautions, considerations, reduplications of consciousness, almost avowed feelings of her way on her own part, and light fingerings of his chords of sensibility, she was understanding, she *had* understood, more things than all the years, up to this strange eventide, had given him an inkling of. They talked, they went on—he hadn’t let her retreat, to whatever it committed him and however abjectly it did so : yet keeping off and off, dealing with such surface facts as involved ancient acquaintance but kept abominations at bay. The recognition, the attestation that she *had* come down for him, that there would be reasons, that she had even hovered and watched, assured herself a little of his habits (which she managed to speak of as if, on their present ampler development, they were much to be deferred to), held them long enough to make vivid how, listen as stiffly or as serenely as he might, she sat there in fear, just as she had so stood there at first, and that her fear had really to do with her calculation of some sort of chance with him. What chance could it possibly be ? Whatever it might have done, on this prodigious showing, with Kate Cookham, it made the present witness to the state of his fortunes simply exquisite : he ground his teeth secretly together as he saw he should have to take *that*. For what did it mean but that she would have liked to pity him if she could have done it with safety ? Ah, however, he must give her no measure of safety !

By the time he had remarked, with that idea, that she probably saw few changes about them there that weren’t for the worse—the place was going down, down and down, so fast that goodness knew where it would stop—and had also mentioned that in spite of this he himself remained faithful, with all its faults loving it still ; by the time he had after that fashion, superficially indulged her, adding a few further lights and just sufficiently dry reflections on local matters, the disappearance of landmarks and important persons, the frequency of gales, the low policy of the Town Council in playing down to cheap excursionists : by the time he had so acquitted himself, and she had observed, of her own motion, that she was staying at the Royal, which he knew for the time-honoured, the conservative and exclusive hotel, he had made out for himself

at least, the amazing fact that he had been landed by his troubles, at the end of time, in a "social relation," of all things in the world, and how of that luxury he was now having unprecedented experience. He had but once in his life had his nose in the Royal, on the occasion of his himself delivering a parcel during some hiatus in his succession of impossible small boys and meeting in the hall the lady who had bought of him, in the morning, a set of Crabbe ; largely, he flattered himself, under the artful persuasion of his acute remarks on that author, gracefully associated by him, in the colloquy, he remembered, with a glance at Charles Lamb as well, and who went off, in a day or two, without settling, though he received her cheque from London three or four months later.

That hadn't been a social relation ; and truly, deep within his appeal to himself to be remarkable, to be imperturbable and impenetrable, to be in fact quite incomparable now, throbbed the intense vision of his drawing out and draining dry the sensation he had begun to taste. He would do it, moreover—that would be the refinement of his art—not only without the betraying anxiety of a single question, but just even by seeing her flounder (since she must, in a vagueness deeply disconcerting to her) as to her real effect on him. She was distinctly floundering by the time he had brought her—it had taken ten minutes—down to a consciousness of absurd and twaddling topics, to the reported and precarious state, for instance, of the syndicate running the Bijou Theatre at the Picrhead—all as an admonition that she might want him to know why she was thus waiting on him, might want it for all she was worth, before he had ceased to be so remarkable as not to ask her. He didn't—and this assuredly was wondrous enough—want to do anything worse to her than let her flounder ; but he was willing to do that so long as it mightn't prevent his seeing at least where *he* was. He seemed still to see where he was even to the minute that followed her final break-off, clearly intended to be resolute, from make-believe talk.

"I wonder if I might prevail on you to come to tea with me to-morrow at five."

He didn't so much as answer it—though he could scarcely believe his ears. To-morrow was Sunday, and the proposal referred, clearly, to the custom of "five-o'clock tea," known to him only by the contemporary novel of manners and the catchy advertisements of table linen. He had never in his life been present at any such luxurious rite, but he was offering practical indifference to it as a false mark of his sense that his social relation had already risen to his chin. "I gave up my very modest, but,

rather interesting little old book business, perhaps you know, ever so long ago."

She floundered so that she could say nothing—meet *that* with no possible word : all the less so that his tone, casual and colourless wholly defied any apprehension of it as a reverse. Silence only came but after a moment she returned to her effort. "If you *can* come I shall be at home. To see you otherwise than thus was, in fact, what, as I tell you, I came down for. But I leave it," she returned, "to your feeling."

He had at this, it struck him, an inspiration ; which he required, however, a minute or two to decide to carry out ; a minute or two during which the shake of his foot over his knee became an intensity of fidget. "Of course I know I still owe you a large sum of money. If it's about *that* you wish to see me," he went on, "I may as well tell you just here that I shall be able to meet my full obligation in the future as little as I've met it in the past. I can never," said Herbert Dodd, "pay up that balance."

He had looked at her while he spoke, but on finishing looked off at the sea again and continued to agitate his foot. He knew now what he had done, and why ; and the sense of her fixed dark eyes on him during his speech and after didn't alter his small contentment. Yet even when she still said nothing he didn't turn round ; he simply kept his corner as if *that* were his point made, should it even be the last word between them. It might have been, for that matter, from the way in which she presently rose, gathering herself, her fine umbrella and her very smart reticule, in the construction of which shining gilt much figured, well together and, after standing another instant, moved across to the rail of the terrace as she had done before and remained, as before, with her back to him, though this time, it well might be under a different fear. A quarter of an hour ago she hadn't tried him, and had had that anxiety : now that she had tried him it wasn't easier—but she was thinking what she still could do. He left her to think—nothing, in fact, more interesting than the way she might decide had ever happened to him ; but it was a part of this also that as she turned round and came nearer again he didn't rise, he gave her no help. If she got any, at least, from his looking up at her only, meeting her fixed eyes once more in silence, that was her own affair. "You must think," she said—"you must take all your time, but I shall be at home." She left it to him thus—she insisted, with her idea, on leaving him somewhere too. And on her side as well she showed an art—which resulted, after another instant, in his having to rise to his feet. He flushed afresh as he did it—it exposed him so shabbily the

THE BENCH OF DESOLATION

more ; and now if she took him in, with each of his seedy items, from head to foot, he didn't and couldn't and wouldn't know it, attaching his eyes hard and straight to something quite away from them.

It stuck in his throat to say he'd come, but she had so curious a way with her that he still less could say he wouldn't, and in a moment had taken refuge in something that was neither. "Are you married?"—he put it to her with that plainness, though it had seemed before he said it to do more for him than while she waited before replying.

"No, I'm not married," she said ; and then had another wait that might have amounted to a question of what this had to do with it.

He surely couldn't have told her ; so that he had recourse, a little poorly as he felt, but to an "Oh !" that still left them opposed. He turned away for it—that is for the pooriness, which, lingering in the air, had almost a vulgar platitude ; and when he presently again wheeled about she had fallen off as for quitting him, only with a pause, once more, for a last look. It was all a bit awkward, but he had another happy thought, which consisted in his silently raising his hat as for a sign of dignified dismissal. He had cultivated of old, for the occasions of life, the right, the discriminated bow, and now, out of the grey limbo of the time when he could care for such things, this flicker of propriety leaped and worked. She might for that matter, herself have liked it ; since, receding further, only with her white face towards him, she paid it the homage of submission. He remained dignified, and she almost humbly went.

5

NOTHING in the world, on the Sunday afternoon, could have prevented him from going ; he was not after all destitute of three or four such articles of clothing as, if they wouldn't particularly grace the occasion, wouldn't positively dishonour it. That deficiency might have kept him away, but no voice of the spirit, no consideration of pride. It sweetened his impatience, in fact—for he fairly felt it a long time to wait—that his pride would really most find its account in his acceptance of these conciliatory steps. From the moment he could put it in that way—that he couldn't refuse to hear what she might have, so very elaborately to say for herself—he ought certainly to be at his ease ; in illustration of which he whistled odd snatches to himself as he

hung about on that cloud-dappled autumn Sunday, a mild private minstrelsy that his lips hadn't known since when? The interval of the twenty-four hours, made longer by a night of many more revivals than oblivions, had, in fact, dragged not a little ; in spite of which, however, our extremely brushed-up and trimmed and polished friend knew an unprecedented flutter as he was ushered, at the Royal Hotel, into Miss Cookham's sitting-room. Yes, it was an adventure, and he had never had an adventure in his life ; the term, for him, was essentially a term of high appreciation—such as disqualified for that figure, under due criticism, every single passage of his past career.

What struck him at the moment as qualifying in the highest degree this actual passage was the fact that at no great distance from his hostess in the luxurious room, as he apprehended it, in which the close of day had begun to hang a few shadows, sat a gentleman who rose as she rose, and whose name she at once mentioned to him. He had for Herbert Dodd all the air of a swell, the gentleman—rather red-faced and bald-headed, but, moustachioed, waistcoated, necktied to the highest pitch, with an effect of chains and rings, of shining teeth in a glassily monocular smile ; a wondrous apparition to have been asked to “meet” him, as in contemporary fiction, or for him to have been asked to meet. “Captain Roper, Mr. Herbert Dodd”—their entertainer introduced them, yes ; but with a sequel immediately afterwards more disconcerting apparently to Captain Roper himself even than to her second and more breathless visitor ; a “Well then, good-bye till the next time,” with a hand thrust straight out, which allowed the personage so addressed no alternative but to lay aside his teacup, even though Herbert saw there was a good deal left in it, and glare about him for his hat. Miss Cookham had had her tea-tray on a small table before her, she had served Captain Roper while waiting for Mr. Dodd ; but she simply dismissed him now, with a high sweet unmistakable decision, a knowledge of what she was about, as our hero would have called it, which enlarged at a stroke the latter's view of the number of different things and sorts of things, in the sphere of manners and ways of those living at their ease, that a social relation would put before one. Captain Roper would have liked to remain, would have liked more tea, but Kate signified in this direct fashion that she had had enough of him. Herbert had seen things, in his walk of life—rough things, plenty ; but never things smoothed with that especial smoothness, carried out as it were by the fine form of Captain Roper's own retreat, which included even a bright convulsed leave-taking cognisance of the

THE BENCH OF DESOLATION

plain, vague individual, of no lustre at all and with the very low-class guard of an old silver watch buttoned away under an ill-made coat, to whom he was sacrificed.

It came to Herbert as he left the place a shade less remarkable—though there was still wonder enough and to spare—that he had been even publicly and designedly sacrificed; exactly so that, as the door closed behind him, Kate Cookham, standing there to wait for it, could seem to say, across the room, to the friend of her youth, only by the expression of her fine eyes: “There see what I do for you!” “For” him—that was the extraordinary thing, and not less so that he was already, within three minutes, after this fashion, taking it in as by the intensity of a new light; a light that was one somehow with this rich inner air of the plush-draped and much-mirrored hotel, where the firelight and the approach of evening confirmed together the privacy, and the loose curtains at the wide window were parted for a command of his old lifelong Parade—the field of life so familiar to him from below and in the wind and the wet, but which he had never in all the long years hung over at this vantage.

“He’s an acquaintance, but a bore,” his hostess explained in respect to Captain Roper. “He turned up yesterday, but I didn’t invite him, and I had said to him before you came in that I was expecting a gentleman with whom I should wish to be alone. I go quite straight at my idea that way, as a rule; but you know,” she now strikingly went on, “how straight I go. And he had had,” she added, “his tea.”

Dodd had been looking all round—had taken in, with the rest, the brightness, the distinguished elegance, as he supposed it, of the tea-service with which she was dealing and the variously-tinted appeal of certain savoury edibles on plates. “Oh, but he *hadn’t* had his tea!” he heard himself the next moment earnestly reply; which speech had at once betrayed, he was then quickly aware, the candour of his interest, the unsophisticated state that had survived so many troubles. If he was so interested how could he be proud, and if he was proud how could he be so interested?

He had made her at any rate laugh outright, and was further conscious, for this, both that it was the first time of that since their new meeting, and that it didn’t affect him as harsh. It affected him, however, as free, for she replied at once, still smiling and as a part of it: “Oh! I think we shall get on!”

This told him he had made some difference for her, shown her the way, or something like it, that she hadn’t been sure of yesterday; which moreover, wasn’t what he had intended—he had come armed for showing her nothing; so that after she had

gone on, with] the same grin of gaiety, "You must at any rate comfortably have yours," there was but one answer for him to make.

His eyes played again over the tea things—they seemed strangely to help him ; but he didn't sit down. "I've come, as you see—but I've come, please, to understand ; and if you require to be alone with me, and if I break bread with you, it seems to me I should first know exactly where I am and to what you suppose I so commit myself." He had thought it out and over and over, particularly the turn about breaking bread ; though perhaps he didn't give it, in her presence—this was impossible, her presence altered so many things—quite the full sound or the weight he had planned.

But it had none the less come to his aid—it had made her perfectly grave. "You commit yourself to nothing. You're perfectly free. It's only I who commit myself."

On which, while she stood there as if all handsomely and deferentially waiting for him to consider and decide, he would have been naturally moved to ask her what she committed herself then *to*—so moved, that is, if he hadn't, before saying it, thought more sharply still of something better. "Oh, that's another thing."

"Yes, that's another thing," Kate Cookham returned. To which she added, "So *now* won't you sit down ?" He sank with deliberation into the seat from which Captain Roper had risen ; she went back to her own, and while she did so spoke again. "I'm *not* free. At least," she said over her tea tray, "I'm free only for this."

Everything was there before them and around them, everything massive and shining, so that he had instinctively fallen back in his chair as for the wondering, the resigned acceptance of it ; where her last words stirred in him a sense of odd depreciation. Only for "that ?" "That" was everything, at this moment, to his long inanition, and the effect, as if she had suddenly and perversely mocked him, was to press the string of a protest. "Isn't 'this' then riches ?"

"Riches ?" she smiled over, handing him his cup—for she had triumphed in having struck from him a question.

"I mean haven't you a lot of money." He didn't care now that it was out ; his cup was in his hand, and what was that but proved interest ? He had succumbed to the social relation.

"Yes, I've money. Of course you wonder—but I've wanted you to wonder. It was to make you take that in that I came. So now you know," she said, leaning back where she faced him, but

in a straighter chair and with her arms closely folded, after a fashion characteristic of her, as for some control of her nerves.

"You came to show you've money?"

"That's one of the things. Not a lot—not even very much. But enough," said Kate Cookham.

"Enough? I should think so!" he again couldn't help a bit crudely exhaling.

"Enough for what I wanted. I don't always live like this—not at all. But I came to the best hotel on purpose. I wanted to show you I could. Now," she asked, "do you understand?"

"Understand?" He only gaped.

She threw up her loosed arms, which dropped again beside her. "I did it *for* you!—I did it *for* you!"

"'For' me—?"

"What I did—what I did here of old."

He stared, trying to see it. "When you made me pay you?"

"The Two hundred and Seventy, all I could get from you, as you reminded me yesterday, so that I had to give up the rest. It was my idea," she went on. "It was my idea."

"To bleed me quite to death?" Oh, his ice was broken now!

"To make you raise money—since you could, you *could*. You did, you did—so what better proof?"

His hands fell from what he had touched; he could only stare—her own manner for it was different now too. "I did. I did indeed." And the woeful weak simplicity of it, which seemed somehow all that was left him, fell even on his own ear.

"Well then, here it is—it isn't lost!" she returned with a graver face.

"Here it is," he gasped, "my poor agonised old money—my blood?"

"Oh, it's *my* blood too, you must know now!" She held up her head as not before—as for her right to speak of the thing to-day most precious to her. "I took it, but this—my being here this way—is what I've made it! That was the idea I had!"

Her "ideas," as things to boast of, staggered him. "To have everything in the world, like this, at my wretched expense?"

She had folded her arms back again—grasping each elbow she sat firm; she knew he could see, and had known well from the first, what she had wanted to say, difficult, monstrous though it might be. "No more than my own—but to do something with your money that you'd never do yourself."

"Myself, myself?" he wonderingly wailed. "Do you know—or don't you?—what my life has been?"

She waited, and for an instant, though the light in the room

had failed a little more and would soon be mainly that of the flashing lamps on the windy Parade, he caught from her dark eye a silver gleam of impatience. "You've suffered and you've worked—which, God knows, is what I've done! Of course you've suffered," she said, "you inevitably had to! We have to," she went on, "to do or to be or to get anything."

"And pray what have I done or been or got?" Herbert Dodd found it almost desolately natural to demand.

It made her cover him again as with all she was thinking of. "Can you imagine nothing, or can't you conceive—?" And then as her challenge struck deeper in, deeper down than it had yet reached and with the effect of a rush of the blood to his face, "It was *for* you, it was *for* you!" she again broke out—"and for what or for whom else could it have been?"

He saw things to a tune now that made him answer straight: "I thought at one time it might have been for Bill Frankle."

"Yes, that was the way you treated me," Miss Cookham as plainly replied.

But he let this pass; his thought had already got away from it. "What good then—it's having been from me—has that ever done me?"

"Doesn't it do you any good *now*?" his friend returned. To which she added, with another dim play of her tormented brightness, before he could speak: "But if you won't have your tea—!"

He had in fact touched nothing and if he could have explained would have pleaded very veraciously that his appetite, keen when he came in, had somehow suddenly failed. It was beyond eating or drinking, what she seemed to want him to take from her. So if he looked before him, over the array, it was to say very grave and graceless: "Am I to understand that you offer to repay me?"

"I offer to repay you with interest, Herbert Dodd"—and the emphasis of the great word was wonderful.

It held him in his place a minute, and held his eyes upon her; after which, agitated too sharply to sit still, he pushed back his chair and stood up. It was as if mere distress or dismay at first worked in him, and was in fact a wave of deep and irresistible emotion which made him, on his feet, sway as in a great trouble and then, to correct it, throw himself stiffly toward the window, where he stood and looked out unseeing. The road, the wide terrace beyond, the seats, the eternal sea beyond that, the lighted lamps now flaring in the October night wind, with the few dispersed people abroad at the tea hour; these things, meeting

and melting into the firelit hospitality at his elbow—or was it that portentous amenity that melted into *them*?—seemed to form round him and to put before him, altogether the strangest of circles and the newest of experiences, in which the unforgettable and the unimaginable were confoundingly mixed. “Oh, oh, oh!”—he could almost howl for it.

And then, while a thick blur for some moments mantled everything, he knew she had got up, that she stood watching him, allowing for everything, again all “cleverly” patient within him, and he heard her speak again as with studied quietness and clearness. “I wanted to take care of you—it was what I first wanted—and what you first consented to. I’d have done it, oh, I’d have done it, I’d have loved you and helped you, and you’d have had no trouble, no bad blighting ruin, in all your easy, yes, just your quiet jolly and comfortable life. I showed you and proved to you this—I brought it home to you, as I fondly fancied, and it made me briefly happy. You swore you cared for me, you wrote it and made me believe it—you pledged me your honour and your faith. Then you turned and changed suddenly, from one day to another; everything altered, you broke your vows, you as good as told me you only wanted it off. You faced me with dislike, and in fact tried not to face me at all; you behaved as if you hated me—you had seen a girl, of great beauty, I admit, who made me a fright and bore.”

This brought them straight round. “No, Kate Cookham.”

“Yes, Herbert Dodd.” She but shook her head, calmly and nobly, in the now gathered dusk, and her memories and her cause and her character—or was it only her arch-subtlety, her line and her “idea?”—gave her an extraordinarily large assurance. She had touched, however, the treasure of his own case—his terrible own case that began to live again at once by the force of her talking of hers, and which could always all cluster about his great asseveration. “No, no, never, never; I had never seen her then and didn’t dream of her; so that when you yourself began to be harsh and sharp with me, and to seem to want to quarrel, I could have but one idea—which was an appearance you didn’t in the least, as I saw it then, account for or disprove.”

“An appearance—?” Kate desired, as with high astonishment, to know which one.

“How *shouldn’t* I have supposed you really to care for Bill Frankle—as, thoroughly believing the motive of your claim for my money to be its help to your marrying him, since you couldn’t marry me. I was only surprised when, time passing, I made out

that that hadn't happened ; and perhaps," he added the next instant, with something of a conscious lapse from the finer style, " hadn't been the question."

She had listened to this only staring, and she was silent after he had said it, so silent for some instants that while he considered her something seemed to fail him, much as if he had thrown out his foot for a step and not found the place to rest it. He jerked round to the window again, and then she answered, but without passion, unless it was that of her weariness for something stupid and forgiven in him, " Oh, the blind the pitiful folly ! "—to which, as it might perfectly have applied to her own behaviour, he returned nothing. She had, moreover, at once gone on. " Put it then that there wasn't much to do—between your finding that you loathed me for another woman, or discovering only, when it came to the point, that you loathed me quite enough for myself."

Which, offered him in the immensely effective fashion, he recognised that he must just unprotestingly and not so very awkwardly—not so very !—take from her ; since, whatever he had thus come to her for, it wasn't to perjure himself with any pretence that, " another woman " or no other woman, he hadn't for years and years, abhorred her. Now he was taking tea with her—or rather, literally, seemed not to be ; but this made no difference, and he let her express it as she would while he distinguished a man he knew, Charley Coote, outside on the Parade, under favour of the empty hour and one of the flaring lamps, making up to a young woman with whom (it stuck out grotesquely in his manner) he had never before conversed. Dodd's own position was that of acquiescing in this recall of what had so bitterly been—but he hadn't come back to her, of himself, to stir up, to recall or to recriminate, and for her it could be the very lesson of her whole present act that if she touched everything. Soon enough she was indeed, and all overwhelmingly, touching everything—with a hand of which the boldness grew.

" But I didn't let *that*, even, make a difference in what I wanted—which was all," she said, " and had only and passionately been, to take care of you. I had *no* money whatever—nothing then of my own, not a penny to come by anyhow : so it wasn't with mine I could do it. But I could do it with yours," she amazingly wound up—" if I could once get yours out of you."

He faced straight about again—his eyebrows higher than they had ever been in his life. " Mine, what penny of it was mine ? What scrap beyond a bare mean little living had I ever pretended to have ? "

She held herself still a minute, visibly with force ; only her

eyes consciously attached to the seat of a chair the back of which her hands, making it tilt toward her a little, grasped as for support. "You pretended to have enough to marry me—and that was all I afterwards claimed of you when you wouldn't—" He was on the point of retorting that he had absolutely pretended to nothing—least of all to the primary desire that such a way of putting it fastened on him : he was on the point for ten seconds of giving her full in the face : "I never *had* any such dream until you yourself—infatuated with me as, frankly, you on the whole appeared to be—got round me and muddled me up and made me behave as if in a way that went against the evidence of my senses." But he was to feel as quickly that whatever the ugly, the spent, the irrecoverable truth, he might better have bitten his tongue off : there beat on him there this strange and other, this so prodigiously different beautiful and dreadful truth that no far remembrance and no abiding ache of his own could wholly falsify, and that was indeed all out with her next words. "That—*using* it for you and using you yourself for your own future—was my motive. I've led my life, which has been an affair, I assure you ; and, as I've told you without your quite seeming to understand, I've brought everything fivefold back to you."

The perspiration broke out on his forehead. "Everything is mine?" he quavered as for the piercing pain of it.

"Everything!" said Kate Cookham.

So it told him how she had loved him—but with the tremendous effect at once of its only glaring out at him from the whole thing that it was verily she, a thousand times over, who, in the exposure of his youth and his vanity, had, on the bench of desolation, the scene of yesterday's own renewal, left for him no forward step to take. It hung there for him tragically vivid again, the hour she had first found him sequestered and accessible after making his acquaintance at his shop. And from this, by a succession of links that fairly clicked to his ear as with their perfect fitting, the fate and the pain and the payment of others stood together in a great grim order. Everything there then was *his*—to make him ask what had been Nan's, poor Nan's of the constant question of whether he need have collapsed. She was before him, she was between them, his little dead dissatisfied wife ; across all whose final woe and whose lowly grave he was to reach out, it appeared, to take gifts. He saw them too, the gifts ; saw them—she bristled with them—in his actual companion's brave and sincere and authoritative figure, her strangest of demonstrations. But the other appearance was intenser, as if their ghost had waved wild arms ; so that half a minute hadn't passed before the one thing

that remained of Nan, and that yet thus became a quite mighty and momentous poor thing, was sitting on his lips as for its sole opportunity.

"Can you give me your word of honour that I mightn't, under decent advice, have defied you?"

It made her turn very white; but now that she had said what she *had* said she could still hold up her head. "Certainly you might have defied me, Herbert Dodd."

"They would have told me you had no legal case?"

Well, if she was pale she was bold. "You talk of decent advice—!" She broke off, there was too much to say, and all needless. What she said instead was: "They would have told you I had nothing."

"I didn't so much as ask," her sad visitor remarked.

"Of course you didn't so much as ask."

"I couldn't be so outrageously vulgar," he went on.

"I could by God's help!" said Kate Cookham.

"Thank you." He had found at his command a tone that made him feel more gentleman-like than he had ever felt in his life or should doubtless ever feel again. It might have been enough—but somehow as they stood there with this immense clearance between them it wasn't. The clearance was like a sudden gap or great bleak opening through which there blew upon them a deadly chill. Too many things had fallen away, too many new rolled up and over him, and they made something within shake him to his base. It upset the full vessel, and though she kept her eyes on him he let that consequence come, bursting into tears, weakly crying there before her even as he had cried to himself in the hour of his youth when she had made him groundlessly fear. She turned away then—*that* she couldn't watch, and had presently flung herself on the sofa and, all responsively wailing, buried her own face on the cushioned arm. So for a minute their smothered sobs only filled the room. But he made out through this disorder, where he had put down his hat; his stick and his new tan-coloured gloves—they had cost two-and-thruppence and would have represented sacrifices—were on the chair beside it. He picked these articles up and all silently and softly—gasping, that is, but quite on tiptoe—reached the door and let himself out.

OFF there on the bench of desolation a week later she made a more particular statement, which it had taken the remarkably tense interval to render possible. After leaving her at the hotel that last Sunday he had gone forth in his reaggravated trouble and walked straight before him, in the teeth of the west wind, close to the iron rails of the stretched Marina and with his tell-tale face turned from persons occasionally met and toward the surging sea. At the land's end, even in the confirmed darkness and the perhaps imminent big blow, his immemorial nook, small shelter as it yielded, had again received him ; and it was in the course of this heedless session, no doubt, where the agitated air had nothing to add to the commotion within him, that he began to look his extraordinary fortune in the face and see it confess itself at once a fairy-tale and a nightmare. That, visibly, confoundingly, she was still attached to him (attached in fact was a mild word !) and that the unquestionable proof of it was in this offered pecuniary salve, of the thickest composition, for his wounds and sores and shames—these things were the fantastic fable, the tale of money in handfuls, that he seemed to have only to stand there and swallow and digest and feel himself full-fed by ; but the whole of the rest was nightmare, and most of all nightmare his having thus to thank one through whom Nan and his little girls had known torture.

He didn't care for himself now, and this unextinguished and apparently inextinguishable charm by which he had held her was a fact incredibly romantic ; but he gazed with a longer face than he had ever had for anything in the world at this potential acceptance of a great bouncing benefit from the person he intimately, if even in a manner indirectly, associated with the conditions to which his lovely wife and his little girls (who would have been lovely too) had pitifully succumbed. He had accepted the social relation—which meant he had taken even that on trial—without knowing what it so dazzlingly masked ; for a social relation it had become with a vengeance when it drove him about the place as now at his hours of freedom (and he actually and recklessly took, all demoralised and unstrung and unfit either for work or anything else, other liberties that would get him into trouble) under this queer torment of irreconcilable things, of bewildered consciousness of tenderness and patience and cruelty, of great evident mystifying facts that were as little to be questioned

as to be conceived or explained, and that were yet least, withal, to be lost sight of.

On that Sunday night he had wandered wild, incoherently ranging and throbbing, but this became the law of the next days as well, since he lacked more than ever all other resort or refuge and had nowhere to carry, to deposit, or contractedly let loose and lock up, as it were, his swollen consciousness, which fairly split in twain the raw shell of his sordid little boarding place. The arch of the sky and the spread of sea and shore alone gave him space ; he could roam with himself anywhere, in short, far or near—he could only never take himself back. That certitude—that this was impossible to him even should she wait there among her plushes and bronzes ten years—was the thing he kept closest clutch of ; it did wonders for what he would call his self-respect. Exactly as he had left her so he would stand off—even though at moments when he pulled up sharp somewhere to put himself an intensest question his heart almost stood still. The days of the week went by, and as he had left her she stayed ; to the extent, that is, of his having neither sight nor sound of her, and of the failure of every sign. It took nerve, he said, not to return to her, even for curiosity—since how, after all, in the name of wonder, had she invested the fruits of her extortion to such advantage, there being no chapter of all the obscurity of the years to beat that for queerness ? But he dropped, tired to death, on benches, half a dozen times an evening—exactly on purpose to recognise that the nerve required was just the nerve he had.

As the days without a token from her multiplied he came in as well for hours—and these indeed mainly on the bench of desolation—of sitting stiff and stark in presence of the probability that he had lost everything for ever. When he passed the Royal he never turned an eyelash, and when he met Captain Roper on the Front, three days after having been introduced to him, he “cut him dead”—another privileged consequence of a social relation—rather than seem to himself to make the remotest approach to the question of whether Miss Cookham had left Properley. He had cut people in the days of his life before, just as he had come to being himself cut—since there had been no time for him wholly without one or other face of that necessity—but had never affected such a severance as of this rare connexion which helped to give him thus the measure of his really precious sincerity. If he had lost what had hovered before him he had lost it, his only tribute to which proposition was to grind his teeth with one of those “scrunches,” as he would have said, of which the violence fairly reached his ear. It wouldn’t make him lift a

finger, and in fact if Kate had simply taken herself off on the Tuesday or the Wednesday she would have been reabsorbed again into the darkness from which she had emerged—and no lifting of fingers, the unspeakable chapter closed, would ever more avail. That at any rate was the kind of man he still was—even after all that had come and gone, and even if for a few dazed hours certain things had seemed pleasant. The dazed hours had passed, the surge of the old bitterness had dished him (shouldn't he have been shamed if he hadn't?) and he might sit there as before, as always, with nothing at all on earth to look to. He had therefore wrongfully believed himself to be degraded; and the last word about him would be that he *couldn't* then, it appeared, sink to vulgarity as he had tried to let his miseries make him.

And yet on the next Sunday morning, face to face with him again at the land's end, what she very soon came to was: "As if I believed you didn't *know* by what cord you hold me!" Absolutely, too, and just that morning in fact, above all, he wouldn't, he quite couldn't have taken his solemn oath that he hadn't a sneaking remnant, as he might have put it to himself—a remnant of faith in tremendous things still to come of their interview. The day was sunny and breezy, the sea of a cold purple; he wouldn't go to church as he mostly went on most Sunday mornings, that being in its way to a social relation—and not least when two-and-thruppeny tan-coloured gloves were new; which indeed he had the art of keeping them for ages. Yet he would dress himself as he scarce mustered resources for even to figure on the fringe of Society, local and transient, at St. Bernard's and in this trim he took his way westward; occupied largely, as he went, it might have seemed to any person pursuing the same course and happening to observe him, in a fascinated study of the motions of his shadow, the more or less grotesque shape projected, in front of him and mostly a bit to the right, over the blanched asphalt of the Parade and dangling and dancing at such a rate, shooting out and then contracting, that, viewed in themselves, its eccentricities might have formed the basis of an interesting challenge: "Find the state of mind, guess the nature of the agitation, possessing the person so remarkably represented!" Herbert Dodd, for that matter, might have been himself attempting to make by the sun's sharp aid some approach to his immediate horoscope.

It had at any rate been thus put before him that the dandling and dancing of his image occasionally gave way to perfect immobility, when he stopped and kept his eyes on it. "Suppose she should come, suppose she *should*!" it is revealed at least to

ourselves that he had at these moments audibly breathed—breathed with the intensity of an arrest between hope and fear. It had glimmered upon him from early, with the look of the day, that, given all else that could happen, this would be rather, as he put it, in her line ; and the possibility lived for him, as he proceeded, to the tune of a suspense almost sickening. It was from one small stage of his pilgrimage to another, the “For ever, never !” of the sentimental case the playmates of his youth used to pretend to settle by plucking the petals of a daisy. But it came to his truly turning faint—so “queer” he felt—when, at the gained point of the long stretch from which he could always tell, he arrived within positive sight of his immemorial goal. His seat was taken and she was keeping it for him—it could only be *she* there in possession ; whereby it shone out for Herbert Dodd that if he hadn’t been quite sure of her recurrence she had at least been quite sure of his. That pulled him up to some purpose, where recognition began for them—or to the effect, in other words, of his pausing to judge if he could bear, for the sharpest note of their intercourse, this inveterate demonstration of her making him do what she liked. What settled the question for him then—and just while they avowedly watched each other, over the long interval, before closing, as if, on either side, for the major advantage—what settled it was this very fact that what she liked she liked so terribly. If it were simply to “use” him, as she had said the last time, and no matter to the profit of which of them she called it, one might let it go for that ; since it could make her wait over, day after day, in that fashion, and with such a spending of money, on the hazard of their meeting again. How could she be the least sure he would ever again consent to it after the proved action on him, a week ago, of her last monstrous honesty ? It was indeed positively as if he were now himself putting this influence—and for their common edification—to the supreme, to the finest test. He had a sublime, an ideal flight, which lasted about a minute. “Suppose now that I see her there and what she had taken so characteristically for granted, suppose I just show her that she *hasn’t* only confidently to wait or whistle for me, and that the length of my leash is greater than she measures, and that everything is impossible always ?—show it by turning my back on her now and walking straight away. She won’t be able not to understand *that* !”

Nothing had passed, across their distance, but the mute apprehension of each on the part of each ; the whole expanse, at the church hour, was void of other life (he had scarce met a creature on his way from end to end) and the sun-seasoned gusts

kept brushing the air and all the larger prospect clean. It was through this beautiful lucidity that he watched her watch him as it were—watch him for what he would do. Neither moved at this high tension ; Kate Cookham, her face fixed on him, only waited with a stiff appearance of leaving him, not for dignity but to an effect of even deeper perversity for kindness, free to choose. It somehow affected him at present, this attitude, as a gauge of her *knowing too*—knowing, that is, that he wasn't really free, that this was the thinnest of vain parades, the poorest of hollow heroics, that his need, his solitude, his suffered wrong, his exhausted rancour, his foredoomed submission to any shown interest, all hung together too heavy on him to let the weak wings of his pride do more than vaguely tremble. They couldn't, they didn't carry him a single beat further away ; according to which he stood rooted, neither retreating nor advancing, but presently correcting his own share of their bleak exchange by looking off at the sea. Deeply conscious of the awkwardness this posture gave him, he yet clung to it as the last shred of his honour, to the clear argument that it was one thing for him to have felt beneath all others, the previous days, that she was to be counted on, but quite a different for her to have felt that *he* was. His checked approach arriving thus at no term, could in these odd conditions have established that he wasn't only if Kate Cookham had, as either of them might have said, taken it so—if she had given up the game at last by rising, by walking away and adding to the distance between them, and he had then definitely let her vanish into space. It became a fact that when she did finally rise—though after how long our record scarce takes on itself to say—it was not to confirm their separation but to put an end to it ; and this by slowly approaching him till she had come within earshot. He had wondered, once aware of it in spite of his averted face, what she would say and on what note, as it were, she would break their week's silence ; so that he had to recognise anew, her voice reaching him, that remarkable quality in her which again and again came up for him as her art.

"There are twelve hundred and sixty pounds, to be definite, but I have it all down for you—and you've only to draw."

They lost themselves, these words, rare and exquisite, in the wild bright genial medium and the Sunday stillness, but even while that occurred and he was gaping, for it was she herself there, in her battered lady-like truth, to answer for them, to represent them, and, if a further grace than their simple syllabled beauty were conceivable, almost embarrassingly to cause them to materialise. Yes, she let her smart and tight little reticule hang

as if it bulged, beneath its clasp, with the whole portentous sum, and he felt himself glare again at this vividest of her attested claims. She might have been ready, on the spot, to open the store to the plunge of his hand, or, with the situation otherwise conceived, to impose on his pauperised state an acceptance of alms on a scale unprecedented in the annals of street charity. Nothing so much counted for him, however, neither grave numeral nor elegant fraction, as the short, rich, rounded word that the breeze had picked up as it dropped and seemed now to blow about between them. "To draw—to draw?" Yes, he gaped at it as if it had no sense; the fact being that even while he did so he was reading into her use of the term more romance than any word in the language had ever had for him. He, Herbert Dodd, was to live to "draw," like people, scarce hampered by the conditions of earth, whom he had remotely and circuitously heard about, and in fact when he walked back with her to where she had been sitting it was very much, for his strained nerves, as if the very bench of desolation itself were to be the scene of that exploit and he mightn't really live till he reached it.

When they had sat down together she did press the spring of her reticule, extracting from it, not a handful of gold nor a packet of crisp notes, but an oblong sealed letter, which she had thus waited on him, she remarked, on purpose to deliver, and which would certify, with sundry particulars, to the credit she had opened for him at a London bank. He took it from her without looking at it, and held it, in the same manner, conspicuous and unassimilated, for most of the rest of the immediate time, appearing embarrassed with it, nervously twisting and flapping it, yet thus publicly retaining it even while aware, beneath everything, of the strange, the quite dreadful, wouldn't it be? engagement that such inaction practically stood for. He could accept money to that amount, yes—but not for nothing in return. For what then in return? He kept asking himself for what, while she said other things and made above all, in her high, shrewd, successful way, the point that, no, he needn't pretend that his conviction of her continued personal interest in him wouldn't have tied him over any question besetting him since their separation. She put it to him that the deep instinct of where he should at last find her must confidently have worked for him, since she confessed to her instinct of where she should find him; which meant—oh, it came home to him as he fingered his sealed treasure!—neither more nor less than that she had now created between them an equality of experience. He wasn't to have done all the suffering,

THE BENCH OF DESOLATION

she was to have "been through" things he couldn't even guess at ; and since he was bargaining away his right ever again to allude to the unforgettable, so much there was of it, what her tacit proposition came to was that they were "square" and might start afresh.

He didn't take up her charge, as his so compromised "pride" yet in a manner prompted him, that he had enjoyed all the week all those elements of ease about her ; the most he achieved for that was to declare, with an ingenuity contributing to float him no small distance further, that of course he had turned up at their old place of tryst, which had been through the years, the haunt of his solitude and the goal of his walk any Sunday morning that seemed too beautiful for church ; but that he hadn't in the least built on her presence there—since that supposition gave him, she would understand, wouldn't she ? the air, disagreeable to him, of having come in search of her. Her quest of himself, once he had been seated there, would have been another matter—but in short, "Of course after all you did come to me, just now didn't you ?" He felt himself, too, lamely and gracelessly grin, as for the final kick of his honour, in confirmation of the record that he had then yielded but to her humility. Her humility became for him at this hour and to this tune, on the bench of desolation, a quantity more prodigious and even more mysterious than that other guaranteed quantity the finger tips of his left hand could feel the tap of by the action of his right ; though what was especially extraordinary was the manner in which she could keep making him such allowances and yet meet him again, at some turn, as with her residuum for her clever self so great.

"Come to you, Herbert Dodd ?" she imperturbably echoed. "I've been coming to you for the last ten years !"

There had been for him just before his sixty supreme seconds of intensest aspiration—a minute of his keeping his certificate poised for a sharp thrust back at her, the thrust of the wild freedom of his saying : "No, no, I can't give them up ; I can't simply sink them deep down in my soul for ever, with no cross in all my future to mark *that* burial ; so that if this is what our arrangement means I must decline to have anything to do with it." The words none the less hadn't come, and when she had herself, a couple of minutes later, spoken those others, the blood rose to his face as if, given his stiffness and her extravagance, he had just indeed saved himself.

Everything in fact stopped, even his fidget with his paper ; she imposed a hush, she imposed at any rate the conscious decent form of one, and he couldn't afterward have told how long, at

this juncture, he must have sat simply gazing before him. It was so long, at any rate, that Kate herself got up—and quite indeed, presently, as if her own forms were now at an end. He had returned her nothing so what was she waiting for? She had been on the two other occasions momentarily at a loss, but never so much so, no doubt, as was thus testified to by her leaving the bench and moving over once more to the rail of the terrace. She could carry it off, in a manner, with her resources, that she was waiting with so little to wait for; she could face him again, after looking off at the sea, as if this slightly stiff delay, not wholly exempt from awkwardness, had been but a fine scruple of her courtesy. She had gathered herself in; after giving him time to appeal she could take it that he had decided and that nothing was left for her to do. “Well then,” she clearly launched at him across the broad walk—“well then, good-bye.”

She had come nearer with it, as if he might rise for some show of express separation; but he only leaned back motionless, his eyes on her now—he kept her a moment before him. “Do you mean that we don’t—that we don’t—?” But he broke down.

“Do I ‘mean’—?” She remained as for questions he might ask, but it was well-nigh as if there played through her dotty veil an irrepressible irony for that particular one. “I’ve meant, for long years, I think, all I am capable of meaning. I’ve meant so much that I can’t mean more. So there it is.”

“But if you go,” he appealed—and with a sense as of a final flatness, however he arranged it, for his own attitude—“but if you go shan’t I see you again?”

She waited a little and it was strangely for him now as if—though at last so much more gorged with her tribute than she had ever been with his—something still depended on her. “Do you *like* to see me?” she very simply asked.

At this he did get up; that was easier than to say—at least with responsive simplicity; and again for a little he looked hard and in silence at his letter; which, at last, raising his eyes to her own for the act, while he masked their conscious ruefulness, to his utmost, in some air of assurance, he slipped into the inner pocket of his coat, letting it settle there securely. “You’re too wonderful.” But he frowned at her with it as never in his life. “Where does it all come from?”

“The wonder of poor me?” Kate Cookham said. “It comes from you.”

He shook his head slowly—feeling, with his letter there against his heart, such a new agility, almost such a new range of interest.

“I mean so much money—so extraordinary much.”

THE BENCH OF DESOLATION

Well, she held him awhile blank. "Does it seem to you extraordinary much—twelve-hundred-and-sixty? Because you know," she added, "it's all."

"It's enough!" he returned with a slight thoughtful droop of his head to the right and his eyes attached to the far horizon as through a shade of shyness for what he was saying. He felt all her own lingering nearness somehow on his cheek.

"It's enough? Thank you then!" she rather oddly went on. He shifted a little his posture. "It was more than a hundred a year—for you to get together."

"Yes," she assented, "that was what year by year I tried for."

"But you could live all the while and have that—!" Yes he was at liberty, as he hadn't been, quite pleasantly to marvel. All his wonderments in life had been hitherto unanswered—and didn't the change mean that here again was the social relation?

"Ah, I didn't live as you saw me the other day."

"Yes," he answered—and didn't he the next instant feel he must fairly have smiled with it?—"the other day you *were* going it!"

"For once in my life," said Kate Cookham. "I've left the hotel," she after a moment added.

"Ah, you're in—a—lodgings?" he found himself inquiring as for positive sociability.

She had an apparently slight shade of hesitation, but in an instant it was all right; as what he showed he wanted to know she seemed mostly to give him. "Yes—but far of course from here. Up on the hill." To which, after another instant, "At The Mount, Castle Terrace," she subjoined.

"Oh, I *know* The Mount. And Castle Terrace is awfully sunny and nice."

"Awfully sunny and nice," Kate Cookham took from him.

"So that if it isn't like the Royal, why you're at least comfortable."

"I shall be comfortable anywhere now," she replied with a certain dryness.

It was astonishing, however, what had become of his own. "Because I've accepted—?"

"Call it that," she dimly smiled.

"I hope then at any rate," he returned, "you can now thoroughly rest." He spoke as for a cheerful conclusion and moved again also to smile, though with a poor grimace, no doubt; since what he seemed most clearly to feel was that since he "accepted" he mustn't, for his last note, have accepted in sulkiness or gloom. With that, at the same time, he couldn't but

THE BENCH OF DESOLATION

know, in all his fibres, that with such a still watching face as the dotted veil didn't disguise for him there was no possible concluding, at least on his part. On hers, on hers it was—as he had so often for a week had reflectively to pronounce things—another affair. Ah, somehow, both formidably and helpfully, her face concluded—yet in a sense so strangely enshrouded in things she didn't tell him. What must she, what mustn't she, have done? What she had said—she had really told him nothing—was no account of her life; in the midst of which conflict of opposed recognitions, at any rate, it was as if, for all he could do, he himself now considerably floundered. “But I can't think—I can't think—!”

“You can't think I can have made so much money in the time and been honest?”

“Oh, you've been honest!” Herbert Dodd distinctly allowed.

It moved her stillness to a gesture—which, however, she had as promptly checked; and she went on the next instant as for further generosity to his failure of thought. “Everything was possible, under my stress, with my hatred.”

“Your hatred—?” For she had paused as if it were after all too difficult.

“Of what I should for so long have been doing to you.”

With this, for all his failures, a greater light than any yet shone upon him. “It made you think of ways—?”

“It made me think of everything. It made me work,” said Kate Cookham. She added, however, the next moment: “But that's my story.”

“And I mayn't hear it?”

“No—because I mayn't hear yours.”

“Oh, mine—!” he said with the strangest, saddest yet after all most resigned sense of surrender of it; which he tried to make sound as if he couldn't have told it, for its splendour of misery, even if he would.

It seemed to move in her a little, exactly that sense of the invidious. “Ah, mine too, I assure you—!”

He rallied at once to the interest. “Oh, we can talk then?”

“Never,” she most oddly replied. “Never,” said Kate Cookham.

They remained so, face to face; the effect of which for him was that he had after a little understood why. That was fundamental. “Well, I see.”

Thus confronted they stayed; and then, as he saw with a contentment that came up from deeper still, it was indeed she who, with her worn fine face, would conclude. “But I can take care of you.”

THE BENCH OF DESOLATION

"You *have*!" he said as with nothing left with him but a beautiful appreciative candour.

"Oh, but you'll want it now in a way—!" she responsibly answered.

He waited a moment, dropping again on the seat. So, while she still stood, he looked up at her ; with the sense somehow that there were too many things and that they were all together, terribly, irresistibly, doubtless blessedly, in her eyes and in her whole person ; which thus affected him for the moment as more than he could bear. He leaned forward, dropping his elbows to his knees and pressing his head on his hands. So he stayed, saying nothing ; only, with the sense of her own sustained, renewed and wonderful action, knowing that an arm had passed round him and that he was held. She was beside him on the bench of desolation.